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ABSTRACT

The literacy programs and policies implemented in Australia over the past decade were reviewed to identify initiatives that have and have not had a positive impact on vocational education and training (VET) and lifelong learning opportunities. Policies and practices in seven other countries were also reviewed. The following themes received particular attention: the impact of national policy through take-up of the National Collaborative Adult English Language and Literacy Strategy; the lack of state-based adult literacy and numeracy program development; informants' knowledge of key policy developments relevant to adult literacy policy and provision; mechanisms other than policy driving practice; predominance of training discourse; competing discourses; state-based initiatives; curriculum development and implementation; and the decline in professional development. The following initiatives were generally acknowledged as working to improve VET and/or lifelong learning outcomes: (1) development of accredited curricula in adult literacy and numeracy and the pathways they create for learners; (2) the various forms of support given to apprentices and trainees in their VET; (3) development and implementation of accredited curricula and various support mechanisms for volunteer tutors; and (4) specific resources delivered through the Australian National Training Authority Adult Literacy Innovative Projects Program. (Thirty-five references and an 85-item bibliography are included. The survey instrument is appended.) (MN)

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A decade of literacy: policy, programs and perspectives

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&

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Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium (ALNARC)

Griffith University

ALNARC National Research Program 2001-2002

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Introduction

ALNARC has undertaken a nationally significant collaborative program consisting of four interlocking research projects. The program's outputs will consolidate Australian adult literacy and numeracy research over recent years in a framework of national and international research about the role of adult literacy and numeracy in lifelong learning and socio-economic wellbeing.

This report forms part of the 2001/2 research program, with specific focus on Project 1: *What does the past tell us about adult literacy and numeracy policy, provision and research?*

More specifically, it addresses the following research questions:

- What initiatives have been undertaken in recent years in adult literacy policy and research? How have they been designed to improve vocational and lifelong learning opportunities?

- Can Australia be informed by new policy and program developments in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in industrialised countries?

The project is, in part, about policy research, however it takes the position first promulgated by Lerner and Lasswell (1951, cited in Sum et al, 2002) that it is not the role of policy research to define policy; rather its purpose is to locate a body of evidence from which informed policy may then be developed.

In order to determine this 'body of evidence' the project explored a range of 'sites' for information on adult literacy and numeracy in Australia over the last decade or so since the enactment of the Australian Language and Literacy Policy (Dawkins, 1991). These 'sites,' in the form of [spoken and written] texts include:

1. A brief history of adult literacy and numeracy policy provision in Australia based on a chronology of the legislation for provision and the ensuing program implementation in Australia from the 1980's to the present day;

2. A brief discussion of the National Collaborative Adult English Language and Literacy Strategy (NCAELLS) which was the enactment between the Federal Government and the States and Territories and gave shape and procedural form to the *Australian Language and Literacy Policy* (ALLP, 1991);

3. A summary of the documents reporting on the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), covering the period 1996 to 2000, as a scan of an international and local perspective of Australia's place in a world scheme of adult literacy and numeracy achievement;

4. A discussion of the characteristic features of conceptual models of the organisation of bureaucracies culminating in the "New Bureaucrat" (Weller, 2001) offered as a means of explaining changes to the political and bureaucratic environment that existed in the early 1990s in Australia when adult literacy was given a central place in political agendas, and the current climate in which interviews with key informants to the project were undertaken;

5. An analysis of taped interview transcripts with key government, public and private sector informants involved with policy formulation, implementation, delivery and evaluation of Australian adult literacy and numeracy programs. These interviews were designed to collect the talk of these informants to determine the accounts they offered of adult literacy and numeracy policy and provision within their respective states and territories. Of particular interest in this process is evidence of consistency and diversity in approaches taken to policy and implementation within States and Territories;

6. Finally, in response to the second research question, a detailed summary of readings and research on overseas adult literacy and numeracy policy and program implementation in selected countries is presented. The countries include participants in the IALS and selected examples from the developing world. This is followed by an analysis of what these experiences may have to offer to the Australian context.

But to begin with, the authors would like to set out a preliminary set of contextualised comments on the primary philosophical and organisational principles underlying this paper.

Reading the past

> Texts are like archaeological sites within which history and change can be read. They demonstrate to an analytical reader the accretions of the discourses that have been mobilised to construct the field through its history. There are no instances of text which are "pure" realisations of a single discourse but neither is it possible to see history as simply progress, as adding onto to past positions or as supplanting past discourse with the new.
> (Lee & Wickert, 1994, p. 65)

The project acknowledges the value placed by Lee and Wickert on texts as 'sites' to be 'dug over', and adopts Jayyusi's (1984, p. 2) contention that any corpus of data, can be analysed for various aspects of the 'cultural properties' represented therein. The intent of the project was therefore to 'exhume' the 'body of evidence' available in these 'sites' on the basis that it may not only inform future policy development in this area but, more importantly, become the foundation of these developments. The metaphor of an 'exhumation' is deemed appropriate, for our interest is in (re)visiting the evidence left from past endeavours, then considering this with evidence from the present in order to arrive at a better, more informed understanding of the possibilities of the future. The project also takes up Lo Bianco's (2001, p. 33) insistence that action in the form of policy is the intervention which ensues from the unearthing or demonstration of need.

At a particular point in time ...

'Exhumations' usually take place in response to some local, immediate imperative and so it is important to note that this project too has been conducted at a particular moment in Australian history. It is a period marked by unprecedented change in every aspect of our day-to-day lives. Importantly for the concerns of this project, it has been conducted at a time when adult literacy in Australia is operating largely in a policy vacuum. Unlike its international counterparts, Australia had a policy that addressed adult literacy and numeracy concerns a decade ago, but at a time when other western nations (particularly the United Kingdom) are directing substantial effort in this area, Australia

is regarded by many as losing ground. Even though there have been recent Federal government literacy policy initiatives, the importance previously given to adult literacy in the ALLP (1991) has largely been over-shadowed, "despite empirical evidence that should have warranted ongoing federal commitment to a strong adult literacy policy" (Lo Bianco, 2001, p. 33). Furthermore, a decade after the ALLP there needs to be the same realisation that becomes reflected in policy and practice in Australia, as in other countries, that adult literacy and numeracy concerns are grounded and enacted in all aspects of individual and community social and economic wellbeing.

At another particular point in time ...

It is important to remember that Australia's previous adult literacy policy also evolved at a particular historical moment and resulted in part, and as discussed by Wickert (2001), because of "the deliberate strategies adopted by literacy activists in the late 1980s to reposition adult literacy as an economic and thus a mainstream issue, in addition to its social justice dimensions". These activists, who included bureaucrats working within federal and state/territory government departments along with members of professional associations, academics and trade unionists succeeded in getting a policy commitment embodied in text (Wickert, 2001) by linking adult literacy issues to the OECD's then concern with skills levels of industrialised nations. They also used the timing of International Literacy Year in 1990 to their advantage.

Worthy of note also is that it was education policy that took up adult literacy concerns, and to be reminded that, according to Griffin (2000, p. 1) it is commonly accepted that "the education system constitutes one of the most important mechanisms of social redistribution and social justice which a welfare state entails". The extent to which adult literacy policy initiatives incorporated in the ALLP (1991) have succeeded in addressing social redistribution and social justice issues on behalf of the many Australian adults with limited literacy and numeracy skills will be taken up further in this report.

A Brief Historical Overview

This first stage of the project focuses on the last decade or so of adult literacy and numeracy policy developed by the Australian Federal government, then disseminated to and adopted by the Australian States and Territories. However, the first significant development in relation to a national literacy and numeracy policy came a few years before this period, in 1987, with Lo Bianco's *National Policy on Languages* (NPL). During the 1980s, the Labor Government and unions had worked on a series of Accords to limit wages growth and to begin the process of award restructuring, linking increases in wages to productivity gains. At the same time, the national training system was reformed to allow for qualifications which were flexible and portable. As an integral part of this reform, the Minister for Industrial Relations emphasised the requirement for literacy programs to be included as an essential part of retraining and upgrading of existing skills (Morey, 1989). Thus the National Policy on Languages (1987) was timely in giving an impetus to programs and funding which, for the first time, promoted a mainstream approach to adult literacy programs. Funding was provided by the Commonwealth government for an Adult Literacy Action Program - $1.96m for 1987-88 and $2m for 1988-89. In addition, two further amounts of funding were announced: the Designated Grants Program of TAFE for adult literacy ($1.1m) and for non-government adult education ($1.4m) (AACLAME, 1990). Programs funded under the NPL Adult Literacy Action Campaign reflected the tensions apparent in the field at that time about whether adult literacy should become part of the new vocational and training reform agenda, to receive funding and be part of the mainstream, to become professionalised, or to maintain a community, social justice focus with ad hoc funding. These debates resulted in a pragmatic decision to join the mainstream in order to survive while acknowledging the necessity to become proactive in shaping the agenda and redefining the notion of competence, for example in what became the *National Reporting System*. However, it was not until 1991 that John Dawkin's White Paper *Australia's Language: The Australian Language and Literacy Policy* (ALLP) laid in place the structural arrangements for an integrated approach to literacy programs, including adult literacy and numeracy (traditionally incorporated in a focus on adult literacy in Australia), as a part of a national policy on provision.

The *ALLP* formalised arrangements between its policy and program objectives and those of other language and literacy/numeracy policies, for example, Vocationally Oriented Adult Literacy (VOAL) programs. This was achieved by the increased funding of the *Workplace English Language and Literacy Program* (WELL) and by a renewal of the old *Adult Migrant English Program* (AMEP). Through the development of the *Interim Literacy Course Matrix*, specially targeted groups of disadvantaged clients perceived to have literacy and numeracy deficits were able to access the Jobtrain program either directly or through the DSS/DEET Jet (for sole parents) or Newstart initiatives, the main Labour Market Programs which provided literacy and numeracy education in conjunction with vocational skills for unemployed people. Funded instruction was then made available to them on a voluntary basis. The Office of Labour Market Adjustments (OLMA) provided similar training and allowances to people made redundant from a range of manufacturing industries by micro economic reform.

At the same time the *National Language and Literacy Institute of Australia* (NLLIA) was created with earmarked funding for adult literacy research. Part of the network

established by the NLLIA, funded by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) through DEET, was the national literacy research network, a section of which was later to become the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium (ALNARC). Many new networks and collaborations between industry, government, researchers and practitioners also came into being. The dominant political discourse of the day focused on two key points: adult literacy and numeracy delivery would be for identified target groups and that all target groups would have equitable access to basic education and training.

However a subtle change in approach to an intensified focus on literacy and numeracy specific to the workplace resulted as a consequence of the changed economic climate of the early 1990's. At this time, a study of the rationale of policy documents reveals that the government was focused on a loss of global competitiveness, particularly in Australian manufacturing and high tech industries, caused by a number of industrial issues and lack of training. While it was recognised that the workforce was underskilled, rather belatedly came the understanding that "it is not possible to have successful retraining programs for a number of people in the workforce unless you first of all provide them with the opportunity to develop adult literacy and basic education" (Simpson, 1988: 4). Thus the policy discourse from this period reflects a growing tendency on the part of the Federal government initially, but later by State governments as well, to see education and training (and adult literacy and numeracy instruction as a component part of both) as heavily implicated in the drive towards increased work productivity and vocationally oriented, competency based training. The ultimate consequence of this emphasis was a reframing of adult literacy and numeracy programs away from literacy for social purposes towards literacy for productivity, for national economic goals.

With the *One Nation* (1992) Budget, the Keating government gave an unprecedented $720 million to the Technical and Further Education (TAFE) sector as part of the national reform agenda in education and training. (By the end of the ALLP funding cycle in 1994, program implementation funding amounted to almost $1 billion). Reports like the *Mayer* (1992) and *Carmichael Reports* (1992) were commissioned by and delivered to the Federal government in response to the economic climate and the perceived need for growth in Australian productivity, particularly in manufacturing and the new high technology and information technology sectors. These reports were based on a premise that productivity and employment outcomes could be achieved through upskilling a 'deficit' workforce for new demands in an increasingly competitive marketplace for manufacturing, information technology and primary production goods. The perceptions underlying these seminal reports only further promoted the view that literacy and numeracy skills ought to be linked to productivity, workplace outcomes, and competency for vocational employment.

With the expansive ALLP funding went an emphasis on consumables and deliverables as outcomes in adult literacy and numeracy instruction. Curricula and student contact hours were expected to be acquitted in terms of outcomes in workplace productivity where programs were delivered 'on the job' and new participation targets and assessment outcomes for TAFEs and other providers funded for adult literacy and numeracy programs. The corollary was that attainment of these goals could be achieved by centralising education and training provision rather than diversifying through customised private provision or local programs in the community sector. TAFE became

the primary public provider of adult literacy and numeracy, alongside general entry level vocational education based on competencies related to specific industrial training. The stage was thus set for a vision of adult literacy and numeracy provision as a strategic activity able to be linked with public economic agendas. Adult literacy might also be delivered most expeditiously in accordance with other strategic activities which were the provenance of the States education and training facilities. All that was required was to actually come to some formal arrangement between States and Territories and the Commonwealth as to how this process might be achieved.

National Collaborative Adult English Language and Literacy Strategy

This section begins with a brief review of the NCAELLS in order to provide some further details on this significant initiative that grew out of Australia's previous adult literacy policy, embodied in the broader document, the ALLP (1991).

In 1993, the Australian Education Commission (AEC) together with the State and Territory Ministers of Vocational Education, Employment and Training (MOVEET) formally promulgated the *National Collaborative Adult English Language and Literacy Strategy* (NCAELLS). NCAELLS contained six action areas by which all literacy and numeracy programs were to be designed, delivered, moderated, assessed, monitored and reviewed. This document was to underlie the strategic direction of national literacy and numeracy policy and set the criteria by which programs and outcomes were to be assessed and reported. All the states and territories education and training ministers 'signed off' on NCAELLS, however there was a clear consensus that how the objectives would be achieved was a matter for the individual States and Territories.

NCAELLS was endorsed by the then AEC/MOVEET (Australian Education Council/ Ministers of Vocational Education, Employment and Training) working party in April 1993. The strategy represented a significant initiative developed from the Australian Language and Literacy Policy (ALLP, 1991) that included adult language and literacy concerns as part of the then government's overall commitments in this area. The purpose of NCAELLS was to work towards the achievement of the first goal of the ALLP:

> All Australian residents should develop and maintain a level of spoken and written English which is appropriate for a range of contexts with the support of education and training programs addressing their diverse learning needs
> (ALLP, 1991, p. 4)

The Strategy acknowledged the various adult English language and literacy programs then in place that were the responsibility of the commonwealth, but was meant to ensure that there was effective alignment between these areas of provision and vocational education and training, coordinated and funded through the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA), but actually implemented at the state level.

According to the Strategy document, its purpose was to provide "for national consistency in shared areas such as data collection, curriculum and professional development, assessment and reporting systems and research and development activities... to support effective provision and avoid duplication of effort" (NCAELLS, 1993, p. 3).

The Strategy identified six areas for action:

1. Setting the directions
2. Diversifying and expanding the provision of adult English language and literacy programs
3. Widening the resource base

4. Ensuring equitable access

5. Ensuring high quality outcomes

6. Demonstrating effectiveness and value for money.

The Strategy document then set out each of the six areas for action in terms of **objectives** to be met and **strategies** to be employed in meeting these objectives. Groups to be responsible for the strategy's implementation, as well as bodies to provide resources for its implementation, were also identified. A number of these bodies (e.g ALLP Working Party) no longer exist, while others have been subsumed into other groups or federal departments (e.g. DIEA).

Post NCAELLS

The *National Framework in Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Competence,* developed in 1993, provided the competency descriptors to be used within Adult Education and Vocational Education and Training programs and acted as the guide to inform the development of adult English language and literacy curriculum and instruction. The *National Reporting System* (NRS) developed under the framework in 1996 was to furnish reports on students' language, literacy and numeracy achievements as well as provide reference points and standards for industry, enterprise personnel, employment service providers and curriculum writers. It is the primary reporting tool for Federal government funded programs like Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) and Literacy and Numeracy Training (LANT, now Language, Literacy and Numeracy Training, LLANT).

Subsequent developments included the establishment in 1995 of a national framework for professional development of adult literacy practitioners created through the aegis of the TAFE National Staff Development Committee in recognition of TAFE's role at that historical time as the primary, publicly funded provider of adult literacy and numeracy services. Up to 1990, adult literacy provision in some states was reliant on Commonwealth funding. Provision was unstable as there was no guaranteed recurrent funding and most teaching positions were casual, uncertain and unpredictable. The advent of Labour Market Programs and increased funding from the states resulted in some full-time positions being created. However, with degregulation literacy provision was no longer confined to community or TAFE programs. A new range of sites and providers such as workplaces and SkillShares emerged with a tendency to make teachers' work available as mostly short term casualised contracts as funding was moved between competitive, rather than cooperative, small providers in the wake of competitive tendering. Further, competency based assessment emphasised pre-defined, performance outcomes and standards that focused teachers' accountability on assessment and reporting rather than pedagogy. For clients themselves, the tendency was to link literacy learning more closely with financial sanctions for non-attendance. This nexus between a teachers' responsibility as gate keeping the clients' records of attendance for retention of allowance purposes (in LANT programs) and good practice in teaching had many teachers concerned for the validity of their educational role and their relationship of trust with their learners.

Another significant strategic development has been the involvement by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) since 1998 in the *Australian Qualifications Framework* and the various *Training Packages*, all of which are delivered in relation to

competencies which are derived from industry standards and are required to have literacy and numeracy competencies, which are industry specific, 'built in' to them. However, there was no guarantee that after initial instruction, literacy and numeracy support would be built into the course of training and assessment. In fact, ALNARC research indicates that it may be overlooked under the pressures to train workers in minimum time (ALNARC 2000). Nonetheless the connection between adult literacy and numeracy and training has been recognised in workplace training packages and associated products.

The most recent significant strategic development in the area of adult literacy and numeracy policy has been the targeted delivery of *Literacy and Numeracy Training* (LANT, 1998). This program, conducted as part of the federal government's Mutual Obligation arrangements and administered by Centrelink, is for the long term unemployed who are judged to be deficit in literacy and numeracy skills and must undertake involuntary training in these areas in return for continuation of Social Security income. This linkage of instruction for continued income support began with a target population of the young unemployed aged 18-24 years but because of very low initial participation now encompasses all recipients of Newstart allowance found to have low skills. In the light of no Federal adult literacy and numeracy policy articulation since 1996, the implementation of strategies such as professional development, the adoption of training packages and tied and targeted provision for special groups particularly the low skilled, long term unemployed, has been taken up at differential rates and in different degrees by the various States and no doubt colours individuals' views about the effectiveness of overall policy.

The official shelf life of NCAELLS expired in 1996, and with it the imperative for States and Territories to continue to implement the six action areas. This does not mean that States and Territories did not maintain a commitment to adult literacy and numeracy provision, in fact all have to varying degrees. However, the initial impetus in this area certainly weakened, partly as a consequence of diminished or altered funding arrangements, and also because of the impact of more recent federal government initiated imperatives.

It is worth noting that, at a time when the visionary potential of NCAELLS appeared to lose momentum in Australia, the issue of adult literacy and numeracy was achieving international prominence through the conduct and publishing of the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS, 1996). Australia was one of the first seven nations to participate in this survey in 1996, the results of which inspired the commonwealth government to fund the LANT, now LLNP programs. However, as will be shown later in this report, unlike other western nations such as the United Kingdom, the data generated by this survey have not been used to develop new adult literacy policies.

The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) and Australia on the World Adult Literacy Scene

In earlier sections it has been shown how Australia was moving to reposition itself within the global economy through restructuring industry and reforming training. It was recognised that in order to compete Australian need a higly skilled workforce. At the same time there an interest in determining how Australia compared alongside the rest of the world for performance on indices of adult literacy skill. As a result, the Survey of Aspects of Literacy (SAL) was undertaken in Australia between May and July of Census year 1996 as a national survey of people aged 15-74 years of age, designed to measure some elements of Australians' literacy and numeracy skills. These skills were the information processing skills necessary to use printed material found at work, at home and in the community. The tasks were derived from the OECD International Survey of Adult Literacy (1996, 2000) in order that international comparisons might be made. The comparison of Australian literacy and numeracy policy as an initiator of successful literacy and numeracy achievement against comparative international experience will be reflected upon in a later part of the report. However the germane statistics for Australians' literacy and numeracy performance were objectively measured under several indicators:-

Prose literacy	Prose literacy is the ability to understand and use information from various kinds of prose texts, including newspapers, magazines and brochures. The skills required included locating information in texts, integrating two or more pieces of information and generating information by processing information from the text or by making text-based inferences.
Document literacy	Document literacy is the ability to locate and use information contained in materials such as tables, schedules, charts, graphs and maps. The effective use of documents depends partly on being able to locate information in a variety of displays taking various conditions into account, to integrate information from various parts of the document, to generate information by process information or by making inferences, and to transfer information from one source to another.
Quantitative literacy	Quantitative literacy is the ability to perform arithmetic operations using numbers contained in printed texts or documents. The effective use of numbers contained in printed material involves being able to locate numbers and extract them from material that may contain similar but irrelevant information and being able to perform arithmetic operations when the operations to be used must often be inferred. This type of literacy has a strong element of numeracy. However, because quantitative literacy relates to the ability to extract and use numbers from printed texts and documents, it is referred to as a type of literacy.

General skill level distribution in the Australian SAL

The SAL did not define literacy in terms of a basic threshold, above or below which a person was either literate or not literate. Rather it defined literacy as a continuum for each of the three types of literacy denoting how well people used material printed in English. Progression along this continuum was characterized by increased ability to process information and to draw correct inferences based on the material being used. For analytical purposes, the score on the literacy continuum for each type of literacy was divided into five levels (Level 1 [lowest] to Level 5 [highest]). However it should be noted that, because the tasks used to derive literacy ability vary in difficulty, there was a range of abilities even among people within each level.

The skill level distribution of Australian people aged 15-74 years was similar on each of the prose, document and quantitative literacy scales. About 2.6 million people had poor skills (Level 1) and could be expected to experience considerable difficulties in using many of the print materials that are encountered in daily life. About 3.6 million were at Level 2, and could be expected to experience some difficulties in using many of the printed materials that may be encountered in daily life. Level 3 was the largest category, and the skills of the 4.8 million people at this level would enable them to cope with many printed materials found in daily life and work, although not always with a high level of proficiency. Some 2.0 million people were at Level 4 representing good skills, and a relatively small number (300,000) were at Level 5, representing very good skills. People at both Level 4 and 5 are considered most capable of managing the literacy demands of daily life.

Because Level 5 is a comparatively small group for the purposes of analysis, the SAL combined Levels 4 and 5 in most instances. The results also indicate that although people who were on one level on a particular scale were not on the same level on all three scales, it was generally true that the results indicated that people who had very poor (Level 1) or good (Level 4/5) skills were more likely to be at the same level on all three scales than those at Levels 2 and 3 (see Table below).

Skill level	Prose scale		Document scale		Quantitative scale	
	'000	%	'000	%	'000	%
Level 1	2 607.4	19.7	2 580.3	19.5	2 531.8	19.2
Level 2	3 631.9	27.5	3 738.3	28.3	3 590.8	27.2
Level 3	4 668.9	35.3	4 774.2	36.1	4 764.0	36.0
Level 4	2 052.7	15.5	1880.8	14.2	2011.9	15.2
Level 5	259.9	2.0	247.2	1.9	311.3	2.4
Total	13,220.8	100.0	13 220.8	100.0	13 220.8	100.0

FIG 1: NUMBER AND PROPORTION AT EACH SKILL LEVEL

Overview: International Surveys of Adult Literacy

The initial International Survey of Adult Literacy (IALS, 1996) was conducted across seven OECD member nations and proceeded from the original statement of purpose that

> Literacy is no longer defined in terms of a basic threshold of reading ability mastered by almost all of those growing up in developed countries. Rather, literacy is now seen as how adults use written information to function in society...Therefore, inadequate levels of literacy among a broad section of the

> population potentially threaten the strength of economics and the social cohesion of nations
> *(OECD, 1996, p. 13).*

The IALS reported several key factors which, regardless of the country under survey, were indicative of a causal relationship between literacy and numeracy competence and that factor. These factors could, in some other discourses, be called features of disadvantage or social and material exclusion:

1. Whilst many influences affect the opportunity to access literacy enhancing activities, no other factor is as significant as educational attainment. Education is connected to literacy, but it is not the same thing, because at each level of educational attainment, there are individuals world wide at each literacy level.

2. An individual's literacy level and level of educational attainment are directly influenced by their parents' educational attainment. This is even more strongly evident in developing than in industrialised nations and the educational attainment of mothers is particularly predictive.

3. Although more complex than the relationship between literacy and educational attainment, there is also a marked relationship between age and gender and literacy.

4. There is a very complex but demonstrable relationship between economic participation and income distribution and literacy.

5. There appears to be a connection between indicators of social inclusion, cultural and social practice and literacy.
   (IALS 1996, p. 7)

Other findings of the Survey emerged which have greater or lesser importance within participating nations, but strong conclusions have been drawn internationally about the following issues:

a) There are important differences within and across literacy skills within nations. These differences will affect not only overall levels of skill but also the distributions of skill levels and the target audiences for programs and strategies.
b) Literacy skill deficits are to be found not only amongst marginalised groups but do affect significant proportions of the entire adult population.
c) Literacy is strongly correlated with life chances and the use of, or access to opportunities.
d) Literacy is not necessarily synonymous with educational attainment. In some cases, 'schooling' may provide no more than a 'start in life' when it comes to acquiring literacy skills, and it appears to provide a more effective start in some countries than in others. Equally, literacy may be a determinant of educational attainment as much as it may be an outcome.

e) Literacy skills are maintained and strengthened through regular use. So whilst literacy in one sense takes practice, it is effectively enhanced by being social practice as well.

f) Adults with low literacy skills often do not recognise, or may not acknowledge, that they have a problem.

As the Survey was expanded to finally include 23 countries and more IALS materials were published, the initial focus of the *Literacy, Economy and Society* (2000) report was furbished into an increasingly more complex and sophisticated instrument. This later set of documents was in part reflecting concern about developments in global capitalisation and also the growth of the so-called Information Age and the Info-tech Economy. The outcome has been the Final Report of the IALS which is entitled *Literacy in the Information Age* (2000) and which re-focuses the literacy debate in the light of global economic changes:

> Because of these changes, individuals are increasingly required not only to have higher levels of education, but also the capacity to adapt, learn and master changes quickly and efficiently. This requires broad foundation skills that must be regularly updated and complemented with specific skills through training and lifelong learning processes. Literacy skills are critical in this context (Highlights Document, http://www.oecd, 2000, p. 1).

In fact, by bringing together data from 23 countries (both in the developing world like Chile, as well as from foundational OECD countries such as the UK, USA, Canada, Sweden, Germany, Australia and New Zealand) this final report stated that its findings confirmed

> the importance of skills for the effective functioning of labour markets and for the economic success and social advancement of both individuals and societies..... offer(ing) policymakers new insights for crafting policies for lifelong learning that would contribute to economic and social progress (Highlights 2000, p. 1).

For the first time, the findings of the Survey Report are reported in the language often used in discourses about the benefits and outcomes of literacy to individuals and communities, using terms that were about both social and economic involvement, for example

> Literacy also contributes to the economic and social performance of society. It is a necessary ingredient for citizenship and community participation, and shapes the labour force of a country through higher participation rates, higher skill composition and lower chances of unemployment (Highlights, 2000, p. 8).

Incorporated under a new heading called "Literacy, Culture and Civic Skills" is the statement that the voluntary community sector is another important area of informal learning for adults, in addition to the home and the workplace:

> The voluntary sector can be extremely important in the delivery of adult education – especially in reaching out to adults with low literacy skills who might otherwise not enroll in adult education. Participation in the voluntary sector can enhance and build literacy skills, while promoting the development of civic skills and fostering social cohesion in the knowledge economy
>
> (Highlights, 2000, p. 8).

This same section goes on to allude to the connection between higher infant mortality and higher levels of illiteracy and to make the connection, particularly in countries like Canada and the USA, between higher levels of educational attainment, literacy and healthier life style choices around issues like smoking, obesity and health in general. This section concludes by saying that

> Literacy also has a bearing on social and political participation. Higher levels of literacy are associated with participation in voluntary community activities. There is also a measurable association between literacy and female representation in government. More specifically, countries with higher average scores on the prose scale have a greater share of their parliamentary seats held by women (Highlights, 2000, p. 11).

This point of departure from the discussion of the IALS occurs as there is growing international recognition of the link between literacy, social context and community and national wellbeing. This section of the paper demonstrates the complexity of emerging international discourses on adult literacy that have taken it from a point of being simply about people with deficit literacy skills, to a more pragmatic realisation of the interrelatedness of adult literacy issues with other everyday concerns of governments for their nations' economic and social futures.

We now return to adult literacy developments in Australia in the period since 1991, with particular interest in activity since 1996 when the shelf life of the NCAELLS strategy ended. Since that time, adult literacy and numeracy activity has continued in the absence of a specific national policy or strategy, or a framework against which current efforts by the States and the Commonwealth can effectively be viewed and assessed.

In order to examine what this means in terms of current provision arrangements and the initiatives driving these practices, it is necessary to place recent adult literacy programs and practices within the broader perspective of how modern-day governments go about the business of governing.

The last decade has seen a dramatic change in how governments function through their regulatory, legislative, political and judicial infrastructures and what Jessop (1990, cited in Kell 2001, p. 240) has termed 'the state projects' by which he means the mechanisms of the state such as schools, hospitals and other institutions. In order to contextualise the 'talk' of bureaucrats and program convenors, it is very important to have some understanding of the political and bureaucratic climate in which policy may (or may not) be developed. So, Australia's current bureaucratic structures will be discussed briefly before moving on to consider state governments' initiatives in adult literacy and numeracy policy, research and provision over the last decade.

The 'New' Bureaucracy

The initial project brief included the question: What initiatives have been undertaken in recent years in adult literacy policy and research? While some information was gained from an analysis of policy and other documents, a second approach called for the views of those bureaucrats within each State/Territory who had overall responsibilities for adult literacy and numeracy matters. A problem arose when the project was unable to access such a person in all instances. Further, with one exception, those bureaucrats who were available had only held their current positions for a very short time, and in some instances had no background in adult literacy.

Although appearing to be in a generic area of adult literacy and numeracy policy and implementation, the interviewees selected as informants to this project were also in different positions in a series of bureaucracies which could broadly be identified as within the general literacy and numeracy area. Some were policy administrators within the education and training field but with a responsibility and interest in literacy and numeracy and others were bureaucrats within service delivery organisations, that is they had a practitioner role as well as a bureaucratic one within their own administration. In either case, all were specifically questioned about their involvement and views about adult literacy and numeracy policy. However, the nature and complexity of the interview material from bureaucrats, reported on in the next section of this document, has given rise to a need to try to account for and describe the discourse of the 'Bureaucracy' itself.

Further, the desire for some degree of explanation for the discourse of bureaucrats appears warranted because of an acceptance of another theoretical and critically documented notion of what constitutes both the 'new work order' and a less well researched but emerging notion of a world work order organised around the growing 'knowledge economy'. Both these concepts appear to analysts of the discourses around work and management to define what characterises the nature and operations of the modern 'bureaucrat' in the current Australian political, economic and organisational climate.

Given that all Australian bureaucrats operate under these two macro work climates, the 'new work order' and the worldwide 'knowledge economy', then their accounts of their own operations in the face of policy considerations and issues might be expected to share some common features, in spite of specific policy content. That is to say, a bureaucrat might perhaps be expected to think and reply in a certain way regardless of a particular policy context. The reasons for some of the 'standard' features of their talk might have to do with the very nature of modern bureaucratic practice itself. Although it was apparent at times that the bureaucrat was unsure about some issues and avoiding others, the researchers' role was to present what was said, the talk, as a valid account. So, the researcher had to exercise care in characterising talk as classical bureaucratic 'speak' or attributing talk to the policy context alone.

Overview

Discourse about the nature and characteristics of bureaucracy (literally from the French "bureau" or rule conducted from a desk or office) is not new and is continuously evolving in many parts of the world. Early post World War 11 theorists like Max Weber (1947) conceptualised the role and functions of the bureaucracy and in so doing,

attributed certain types of behaviour and approaches as being characteristic of staff at all levels within bureaucratic structures. For example, in Weber's view, a bureaucracy was a servant of government. It was synonymous with efficiency and the development of capitalism and was a means by which any monarchy, democracy, aristocracy or other form of government was able to rule, legitimized under one of three authorities, either charismatic (as in the leadership of an inspirational leader), traditional (as in the naturalised common sense of accepted precedent) or legal-rational (or the 'rule of law').

However, most recent developments in bureaucratic structures and organisations in Australia as elsewhere in the Western world have reflected a post Taylorist view of the changing nature of work and public administration. By the end of the 20th century, many of the most successful economies and public administrations have developed practices and organisational features which have virtually turned the logic of Taylorism found in Weberian models on its head. These groups tend to

- integrate thinking and performance in production;
- define job responsibilities broadly, and to use teamwork; and
- emphasise the continuous improvement and innovation of practice as a fundamental aspect of the way things are done.

Since these latter developments appear significantly characteristic of the Australian work environment, it is appropriate to consider the climate and characteristics of the "new bureaucracy" (Weller 2001) of Australia.

Characteristics of the current Australian context

An important contemporary analysis of the characteristics of the 'new' Australian bureaucrat is the work of Weller in *Australia's Mandarins: the frank and the fearless?* (2001). Whilst it is acknowledged that the chief foci of his analysis are the 'mandarins' of the public service bureaucracy, that is Departmental Heads and Secretaries and those with responsibility in top advisory or ministerial portfolio areas, his descriptions of some of the characteristics of policy advisors appear to be meaningful for all bureaucrats who undertake this function and responsibility at whatever level of seniority and accountability and are therefore relevant to this project.

Firstly, there appears to have been a change in public service appointments, recruitment, education and mobility which "reflect the change in career patterns of their political masters" (Weller, 2001, p.26). This change includes two recent moves each of which reflect the 'new work order'. One is towards more tenuous public sector employment and a climate of staffing based on expertise within limited policy perspectives which are themselves the explicit or 'given' requirement for job competence. The second is the employment of high level, specialised consultants with short term contracts and policy (as distinct from portfolio) specific expertise.

Such appointments are likely to be intrinsically sympathetic to the flavour of government policy. This then leads to a second imperative which is the move from bureaucrats being not only the defenders of Government policy, but seeing themselves as "salespersons" or promoters for policy positions.

The changing pattern of recruitment also leads to a revision of the role of the bureaucrat. While once perceived to be the loyal servant of the minister and 'his' political entourage, now the primary relationship is to a portfolio responsibility and a commitment to a financially driven, audit based, corporate spirit of managerialism (an issue which also emerges in interviews for this project). This primary relationship is affirmed by philosophies underpinning the 'new work order' and the wordwide 'knowledge economy'. Weller (2001, p. 80) describes this momentum in general as reflective of the shift in the function of ministerial advising from "monopoly to competition" wherein

> New expectations, greater resource pressures, wider dispersion of information, a better informed citizenry and political class, new theories of government, greater entanglement with the world outside and more competition to be heard have all had an impact .... They must ride the wind
> (Weller, 2001, p. 35).

Weller's work suggests higher level bureaucrats see their function as enforcing policy implementation through compliance measures and selling policy to a public in need of best practice commercial marketing strategies. At the same time many, but by no means all, do not see, nor do they advocate for a role that includes questioning or critiquing the underlying basis for particular policy positions.

Weller (2001) sums up all of these contributing factors in the description of the 'politicisation' of the role of the bureaucrat. Politicisation was identified by the mandarins whom Weller interviewed and was summarised by one as follows

> "for a public servant to be aware of the government's mandate, philosophic approach and of political constraints is not to be political; it is part of being professional" (Keating, 1996, p. 65)

This politicisation appears to have implications for talk about adult literacy and numeracy policy and examples of this phenomenon will be revealed in the section discussing the analysis of interviews with bureaucrats.

Accounting for adult literacy and numeracy policy and practice in the states and territories

The project brief established that a number of key informants from all of the States and Territories would be interviewed as a way of determining the current state of play in adult literacy and numeracy policy and practice within Australian states/territories.

In order to arrive at a list of key informants in each of the states and territories, advice was first sought from the Director of the Adult Literacy Section within the Department of Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (now Department of Education, Science and Technology). This incumbent provided a list of state-based bureaucrats who are involved at a policy level within their own States but may also serve on a number of committees that manage national adult literacy programs and projects. These people were contacted to be involved, but in some instances these sources suggested alternative people as informants.

The project brief called for the informants to be the bureaucrats within each State/Territory who had overall responsibilities for adult literacy and numeracy matters. Where the project was unable to access such a person, it sought advice from various members of the ALNARC consortium, located in the different States, who provided names of people with a history of involvement in adult literacy and numeracy policy and/or practice.

Through consultation with ALNARC state directors, a list of 'secondary' informants was also compiled at this time. Though it was the original intent just to undertake detailed analysis of the interviews of the key bureaucrat from each State/Territory, and use the interviews from the 'second string' informants as a means of (dis)confirming key themes and issues, this decision was revised. This was partly due, as previously noted, to the fact that a bureaucrat could not be located in every state or territory, and that most of the bureaucrats who were available had only held their current positions for a very short time and had little or no background in adult literacy.

Furthermore, the accounts of the 'second string' informants proved to be too significant not to be given equal status with the interviews of the 'first string' interviewees. All of the 'second string' informants reported long involvement in adult literacy, with many of them being practitioners, either within TAFE, private or community sectors, before moving into positions within state-based bureaucracies or into managerial roles within TAFE, private sector or community-based organisations.

Overall nineteen telephone interviews were conducted with eighteen informants (two people participated in one interview), while one informant submitted a written response to the interview protocol. As part of the ethical clearance for the project, each informant received of a copy of the transcript of their interview, for review or ammendment, and each was assured that they could withdraw from the project at any time. One informant took advantage of this offer and withdrew, with no reason offered. Their interview transcript and all data collected from the informant were destroyed. Nevertheless, perspectives from all states and territories as well as the commonwealth are represented in the interviews.

For the purposes of analysis, each of the key informant interviews was taken as offering an account of adult literacy policy, provision and research in their respective States/Territories/system. The names of the interviewees had been put forward for the

perspectives they could offer to this interest. However, in order to preserve anonymity, each informant was given a code thus any extracts from interview were referred to by code. Similarly the names of individual states and territories or departments were only used when identified in documents.

In consultation with members of the ALNARC consortium, an interview protocol was developed (Appendix 1). The questions were designed to provide informants with the opportunity to discuss the key concerns of the project.

Interviews as offering accounts

From an ethnomethodological perspective, the selected informants are members of the particular context of social activity under study, that is state/territory-based bureaucratic and systemic settings in which decisions are made about adult literacy policy, provision and research. They are practical actors involved in the ongoing achievements of that context, and in Hester and Eglin's (1997) ethnomethodological terms, "practical analysts of, and inquirers into, the world, using whatever materials there are at hand to get done the tasks and businesses they are engaged in".

In this instance, and consistent with ethnomethodological principles, interviews are viewed as exchanges, as crafted texts that acknowledge and reflect the mutual understandings of the participants and become courses of social action within themselves. In order to make sense of ordinary talk, speakers assume that hearers will perform what Heritage (1984, p. 146) called "active contextualising" so that their spoken language will make sense. The significant point to be made about interviews from this perspective is that particular hearing positions are offered by the speakers as "natural" and "factual" so that we are invited to participate in certain beliefs, but also, importantly, in certain silences and omissions. This was particularly salient in one interview when the informant talked authoritatively (but mistakenly) about literacy programs and funding.

The method of interview employed in this study resembles "interview-as-local-accomplishment" (Silverman, 1933, p. 104) in that the extent to which both interviewer and interviewee are relying upon their commonsense knowledge of social structures in order to be heard to be producing "adequate" utterances is acknowledged. In this sense the data "reproduce[s] and rearticulate[s] cultural particulars grounded in given patterns of social organisation" (Silverman, 1993, p. 105).

Drawing on principles of ethnomethodology, it is possible to make two distinct "passes" through interview data (Freebody, in press). The first is to treat the interview session as a particular kind of interactional event, an examination of the practical actions that the parties are involved in. This means we take the interview as an instance of unique talk, but talk nonetheless.

The second move involves the investigation of the content of the interviews as the reflections of a social order as it is constructed by the speakers. Our interest is in how the accounts given by the speakers are provided as descriptions of their social experiences, that is how they give us insights into what the interviewees believe to be relevant to the topic under discussion. Speakers often draw on certain substantiation procedures to support these accounts, and these also become of interest.

While many projects that draw on interview data focus on the empirical details of an interview, an ethnomethodological perspective takes up an interest in the commonalities

and variations in interviews. As instances of cultural practice, interviews provide insights into how informants find ways of telling the truth-for-the-here-and-now; into how informants establish consistency and relevance, and also into how they attend to their co-speakers to accomplish and legitimate their rightful participation in the communicative (interview) event (Freebody, in press). The task for the researchers then is to come to understand and explicate happenings as the participants understand them rather than to pre-empt the nature, significance or consequences of these actions or happenings. In other words, the salience of particular points or events has to be evidenced in the talk as informants make available their own ways of making sense of the topic under discussion.

With these concerns in mind, the researchers made some judgements about what sections, and amounts, of the original data would be presented to develop the emerging themes. These judgements were based on theorisations that emerge out of the analytic method chosen to interpret the talk of the key informants, as well as on the basis that the selected sections provide immediate access to the focus of this study.

Following on from work of this kind conducted by Gunn, Forrest & Freebody (in Freebody et al 1995) and Castleton (2000) the analysis proceeded along the following lines:

- The entire corpus of interviews was scanned to secure a sense of the main features of the talk.
- Statements or sections of the talk that exemplify these features were identified and extracted from the main corpus.
- A more exact chronicling then followed of what these features involved in terms of the main concerns of the project, that is, how have initiatives undertaken in adult literacy and numeracy policy and research been designed to improve vocational and lifelong learning opportunities?
- The interview data was then re-examined to determine if the definitions of these salient features remained consistent with the initial sense of the entire corpus as well as with what participants would endorse.
- Following this process, some tentative themes were developed that were then checked against the corpus of interview data and documents submitted by state bureaucrats.
- A set of interview segments were then selected that showed the prevailing features of the talk. These are offered, when taken out of context, as a way of presenting issues in an 'untangled' form, separated out from other issues also present in the talk. Thus the selected segments are those which most closely represent the salient features of all talk rather than being a collection of extracts from each of the interviews. The extracts are contributed in order to capture the richness and integrity of the data and to detail aspects of the theorisations employed.

All of the interviews were audio taped and full transcripts were then prepared, allowing the researchers to return many times to the data. The data thus provided "highly

detailed and publicly accessible representations of social interaction" (Peräkylä, 1997, p. 203). Transcripts were returned to interviewees for checking before analyis began.

A discussion follows of the main features or overarching themes as these relate to the key interests of the project, and as they emerged in and from the talk of the informants. As a precursor to that discussion, however, a number of points need to be made.

Firstly, the accounts that are offered by the selected informants are very much located within the present, reflecting issues and concerns pertinent to particular States/Territories or systems in which informants were located at a particular moment in time, namely the latter part of 2001 and early 2002. Though a number of the informants did regularly refer to national initiatives in answering the various questions, and there were a number of similarities in the points that were raised, the accounts are all marked by their 'locatedness', reflecting issues and initiatives that are seen to be peculiar to the States/Territories or systems in question.

Secondly, the amount of past history informants were able to offer, or that was available to each informant in framing up his/her account was dependent, first of all, on how long the incumbent had held their current position, and secondly on what had been their background in adult literacy and numeracy prior to taking up their current position. In the case of the bureaucrats, the amount of time they had spent in their current position (or one with overall responsibility for adult literacy and numeracy) varied from six or so years to a matter of months. Experience in adult literacy and numeracy ranged from eighteen years to none at all.

A further point worth highlighting concerns where adult literacy and numeracy is sited within the various State/Territory bureaucracies the project had access to. This siting varied from adult literacy and numeracy being located within departments with sole responsibilities for training and employment, to departments with a broader brief of responsibility for (compulsory and post-compulsory) education, training and employment.

An even more significant point to raise is that in no instance was the informant in a position that was specifically designated 'adult literacy/numeracy'. In all cases the informants held roles with broad responsibilities under which adult literacy and numeracy fell. These roles included responsibilities for policy, planning and resourcing of training, to the placement of adult literacy within adult community education. These different positionings were evidenced in the varying perspectives the informants provided on adult literacy and numeracy policy and practice within the various States/Territories.

These factors became significant when trying to depict in a meaningful, coherent way a history of, and current perspective on, adult literacy and numeracy over the last decade, either at the level of the States/Territories, or in some kind of national, collective sense.

Key themes presented in the talk

Impact of national policy through take-up of NCAELLS

The significance of the impact of NCAELLS in the States and Territories is treated first because of the salience it was given by the majority of informants to the project. Importantly, however, only one of the bureaucrats interviewed made reference to the impact of NCAELLS on how their States/Territories had responded to adult literacy and numeracy issues. This, of course, could be explained in part by the limited time they may have been in their current role and their consequent lack of knowledge of past history, and by the nature and length of their previous involvement in adult literacy. On the other hand, across all 'second string' informants there was strong agreement on the significance of the initial impact of NCAELLS on how adult literacy and numeracy was taken up within the States/Territories/systems they represented.

There are many instances in informants' talk of how NCAELLS acted as a catalyst for an upsurge of activity in the State/Territories, and true to say that, according to our informants, this increased activity addressed, to varying degrees within and across the States and Territories, the six designated priority areas.

One informant commented on NCAELLS' significance in the following terms:

> The linkages between the federal and state and the policy/administrative/practitioners nexus was a very important and effective movement
> (Informant 8).

In providing an accounting of the introduction of NCAELLS in 1993, one interviewee gave the following description:

> So they had a national coordinator and then state-based groups with someone in each State responsible for the group, and it seemed, that - I mean the good thing was that it got people from all the different areas together, like TAFE, prisons, vocational and private providers, Skillshares that were operating, so it did link together all the different areas to develop a strategy for the State
> (Informant 5)

This same informant, however, went on to explain why much that was initially planned never came to fruition:

> But by the time it actually got around to doing that part [implementing State strategy] the funding for it finished and the State didn't continue to fund it
> (Informant 5).

A number of the other 'second string' informants depicted a similar demise in their own states or territories, described by one interviewee:

> XXX did have two implementation policies and had developed a third as a draft, but then NCAELLS by that stage had ceased in about 1996 and therefore the State's I guess commitment to that policy also ceased, and nothing has replaced that
> (Informant 9).

The topic of the impact of NCAELLS will be returned to later in this paper.

Lack of state-based adult literacy and numeracy policy development

A related point that was made notable in the talk was the issue of state-based adult literacy and numeracy policy development. Informants accounts show that, while states implemented their own strategies devised from the NCAELLS, only one State developed its own specifically designated adult literacy and numeracy policy (Queensland Adult English Language Literacy & Numeracy Policy 1994, revised 1997). This policy, in turn, addressed each of the six areas for action identified in NCAELLS. It provided for six regional executive officers throughout the State, with the responsibility of supporting the implementation of the policy. Though the status of this policy has changed as a result of a recent review of the processes of the unit within the Department that was responsible for its implementation, these officers continue to work with community organisations and public and private providers to try to establish synergies between providers and to work with regional departmental staff in order to promote the uptake of language, literacy and numeracy training across their regions, in particular for apprentices and trainees. The executive officers are responsible for coordinating and planning how much literacy and numeracy training the State training department purchases within the region, where considerable emphasis is given to supporting apprentices and trainees in their vocational education courses. Purchasing of programs and support is achieved with ANTA recurrent funds and some State funds as it is in other States and Territories, though not necessarily on a regional basis. Once the responsibility of a separate unit within the State training department, language, literacy and numeracy issues are now meant to be integrated across the various units within that department. This change has lead to an internal review of the delivery of adult language, literacy and numeracy services, with a number of recommendations arising from that process.

One informant described what it seems has been the reality in the States and Territories, including present arrangements in the state with a designated policy:

> A lot of the policy is not written as pure policy, it's written in strategies and in plans
> (Informant 7).

while another informant makes the point that

> In the absence of a separate policy on language and literacy .... what we have seen is the inclusion of statements to do with language and literacy development in the broader policy documents
> (Informant 6).

This kind of inclusion was explained by one informant in the following terms:

> Integration of literacy and numeracy issues in other areas such as the disabilities area, bridging pathways and the National Aboriginal policy (sic) as well, and learning pathways both of which have aspects of literacy provision embedded within them
> (Informant 14).

Informants' knowledge of key policy documents relevant to adult literacy policy and provision

In responding to the question about what key policy documents had driven adult literacy and numeracy research and practice in their State/Territory over the past ten years, informants' accounts typically reflected where adult literacy resided in their respective

bureaucracies/systems. In those States where adult literacy is located within a government department with a brief for training, current adult literacy and numeracy policy and provision is accounted for within a wider discourse on training. According to the informant from one State/Territory, for example, planning for adult language, literacy and numeracy delivery fits within the framework of whole of government *objectives for economic and social prosperity* (Informant 15). This approach is said to be informed in the first instance, by ANTA's Strategic Plan, *Bridge to the Future (ANTA,* 1998*)*, and that various state-based documents are used as *reference points* (Informant 15).

According to another informant, adult literacy and numeracy concerns in that State/Territory are tied to wider government imperatives of securing training and employment for indigenous people, with a planned national railway link providing the impetus for this push:

> We've got a new government ... and one of the major planks of their new policies platform is employment and the development of indigenous people. And to do that they're going to need basic skills and literacy *(Informant 14).*

Closely linked to this initiative is a push from a range of other government agencies for more cross-sectoral links in regional development. In this particular State/Territory (in common with others), literacy and numeracy provision is included in the State government's implementation plan for training that provides for the tendering of specific programs as well as flexible response funding, designed specifically in this instance for indigenous communities, in order to meet their training needs. Though this informant claims that there is some support for literacy in the general community (the example given, however, was for adult migrant education), it was noted that there is no government sponsored Adult and Community Education sector in that State/Territory.

The account given by yet another State government-employed informant, in answer to a question on literacy and numeracy policy development and implementation, very clearly located the funding of integrated literacy and numeracy delivery within vocational education as that State/Territory's primary focus. In the absence of any state-based policy for adult literacy and numeracy, the main mechanism for securing delivery has been the promotion of accredited training through specific, designated curriculum. Delivery of this curriculum has recently been expanded to schools where it has been taken up as part of that State/Territory's VET in Schools program. More specifically, there has been considerable effort given to the adoption of an integrated approach to literacy and numeracy teaching in vocational settings through the implementation of a certificate course in applied vocational studies skills, developed with funds provided through a national project.

Another informant described how state-based goals and specific targets for adult literacy and numeracy provision are written as strategies and plans within that State/Territory's planning and resource allocation process. The interviewee noted that recent, locally commissioned reports had shown that the particular State/Territory in question lagged behind when compared against a number of international and national benchmarks, resulting in a sharper focus on adult literacy and numeracy. Specific targets in relation to literacy and numeracy standards (benchmarks – outcomes) have been set through the planning and resource allocation process. Within that State/Territory, achieving adult literacy and numeracy benchmarks is seen to be tied to having

> a very vibrant and very, very responsive and very sustainable ACE sector which is seen as a very large player in the offering of literacy and numeracy type courses.
> (Informant 7)

A further informant from this same State/Territory described the recognition given to this sector in adult literacy and numeracy provision by stating that it was a key strategy of that government to *keep about 50% of delivery in community settings* (Informant 4).

Within this context, the decision to deliver accredited or non-accredited courses has been made optional, with funding not tied to the outcome of that decision:

> XXX has fought really hard to keep that flexibility in what's taught and how in relation to accreditation when, you know, the national frameworks were being drawn up and I think it may not be the case in other states, but certainly has been the case in XXX
> (Informant 4).

There is now a focus within that State/Territory on

> a collaborative approach across the whole of the post-compulsory sector ... across the sectors of TAFE, ACE, the latter years of secondary school and the higher ed area in response to learner's needs in a more, sort of, if you like, cooperative and seamless approach. We're looking at a number of programs including pathways programs, literacy and numeracy support programs in relation to both targeted areas of needs geographically as well as in distinctive ethnic communities as well as what we call less socio-economically advantaged communities and through support programs for industry and workplace training. ... We're promoting a whole of [education] sector approach, a lot more cooperation and lot more focus on the learner, the individual learner rather than the offerings
> (Informant 7).

Within this particular State/Territory, which has a board with responsibility for overseeing its adult and community education sector, there are future plans to address professional development in adult literacy and numeracy as the recent strategic planning process identified a significant human resource shortage as well as a need to upgrade teachers/trainers' skills within this sector. Furthermore this state review identified a need to develop human and material resources in the access area within the public system.

Mechanisms other than policy driving practice

In explaining how adult literacy and numeracy provision actually happened in the absence of state-based policy, a number of informants claimed that various funding mechanisms, both federal and state/territory-based, provided the impetus for delivery, with one informant noting

> What we're seeing is not so much policy driving these areas but funding mechanisms.... So it's very difficult to separate the policy versus the resource allocation because they're so inter-twined. And those dollars actually determine the implementation which is rather different to having a large organisation which might have a separate policy which might determine allocation of funds
> (Informant 6).

while a further interviewee, located within a provider organisation gave the following explanation:

> Funding is the most powerful driver of what happens in agencies delivering literacies
> (Informant 4).

Predominance of training discourse

A predominant focus on training, and the locating of adult literacy and numeracy within a training dialogue, as indicated in some of the excerpts noted above, was consistent across the talk of all informants, though importantly 'second string' informants did not always ascribe personal agreement with this emphasis. Talk around this subject drew largely on talk about **vocational training**, reflecting the priority given to this area at both federal and state/territory levels. The overall effect achieved by operating out of the 'training Discourse' was that participants were able to give clearly 'hearable' accounts of each State/Territory's or 'systems' approach to adult literacy and numeracy provision.

Details of the talk from the 'training Discourse' vary slightly across the informants, with much of its sense, in most instances, gained by implication and understood by reference to larger interactional settings rather than just local description. Many informants, for example, linked this discourse back to wider national and international discourses about globalisation, technological change, the knowledge economy and economic prosperity. In one instance, a state government bureaucrat accounted for her role within a state department responsible for training as furnishing advice about the purchasing of language, literacy and numeracy delivery that fitted within a wider government training agenda. This informant described the priority given to training in these terms:

> Whatever state government strategies we have, then training is couched within these objectives and if it doesn't fit then it gets, you know, it gets jettisoned
> (Informant 15).

The place of adult literacy and numeracy within a 'training Discourse' was particularly evident in the talk of state government representatives who discussed future plans of their respective departments and, consequently, the future of adult literacy and numeracy policy and provision. One informant who is located in a unit with a focus on Adult and Community Education (where adult literacy and numeracy had traditionally been housed) and responsible for the planning and resource allocation for adult community education providers, many of whom have traditionally delivered adult language, literacy and numeracy programs, described a personal view of the future role in relation to adult literacy and numeracy as follows:

> It's very clear that they're (the Department) looking for this role also to play an important part in the further education plan of XXX and obviously in that further education plan a lot of the language and literacy and numeracy type offerings of the whole of the VET sector will be catered for through this role and therefore we're having a lot more to do with the TAFE institutes and the major providers of vocational education and training
> (Informant 7).

Significant features of the 'training Discourse' that figured prominently in informants' talk included the promotion of the principle of the **integration** of language, literacy and numeracy into vocational education and training. In the words of one informant:

> I think if you have to do it for the job you should get practice in training
> (Informant 15).

An informant from one State/Territory described that government's approach in these terms:

> It's been recognised in the [state/territory] training plan for [national project involving federal and state governments and private sector] there's a need for the integration for some fairly solid pre-vocational type of work that of course includes literacy and numeracy
> (Informant 14).

For many informants, talk of **integration** provided the opportunity to explain how the inclusion of language, literacy and numeracy into Training Packages (main vehicle for the delivery of VET in Australia) had impacted on provision within their particular State/Territory or system. One particular account highlighted how addressing particular clients' requirements had been met through *customising national packages to meet cultural and language needs of people* (Informant 3).

An informant from one state spoke of that state's approach to the integration of literacy and numeracy with vocational education and training through the development of a specific program that provided support for literacy and numeracy within vocational courses:

> This program has been designed at overcoming all the issues as to why students don't usually accept literacy help when they're doing other certificate courses such as it means "I have to go away and do extra time" or "I've got to miss out on practical sessions or things that I need to do in my class", or "I've got to identify myself as being somebody who is a bit dumb", all those sorts of things. So what it does it is actually works on providing the literacy support within the actual course but still with specialist literacy people acting in a team teaching role
> (Informant10).

Other interviewees described specific state-based strategies for assisting apprentices and trainees in their courses, with one informant noting:

> One of the best things we've done in the last few years is make it, you know, mandatory for apprentices and trainees to have their language literacy and numeracy needs identified in the initial training
> (Informant15).

Another informant described the integration of literacy and numeracy into vocational education and training as being effective in the vocational areas, but also makes reference to possible concerns that are taken up later in this discussion:

> The inclusion policy ...the integration of literacy and numeracy into other training has increased both the awareness of difficulties experienced in the training but also the increased importance of the work and employment environments for literacy for curriculum and the contextualising of methods and material. I think it is a two-edged sword, but it certainly is effective in that vocational area *(Informant 8).*

This segment of talk also demonstrates a recurring theme present in many of the accounts offered to the project. That is the linking the adult literacy and numeracy provision to issues of **employment** and **employability.**

Linking talk of training and employment to adult literacy and numeracy concerns also enabled informants to account for the push for **accredited training**, frequently

explained as addressing the need to provide pathways for students so that they could then seek employment or participate in further training:

> Accredited courses has definitely enhanced the vocational outcomes from the point of view that they were more acceptable on the part of customers (as in employers) and therefore meant you could spread the awareness more effectively (Informant 8).

Competing discourses

There is strong evidence in informants' talk of competing discourses (literacy in relation to training or literacy and ACE) though these are clearly allotted a secondary importance, certainly begrudgingly, by those, mostly 'second string' informants, who identify themselves with community sector interests in adult literacy and numeracy. For some informants, this subordinate role given to community-based delivery was (mistakenly) seen as a consequence of a lack of federal policy specifically targeting the community sector. The informants' lack of awareness of Commonwealth/ States/Territories understandings about ACE policy led them to assume a policy 'gap' leaving space for individual State/Territory interpretations and agenda setting.

With the exception of one State/Territory that has, in the words of one informant *a very vibrant and very, very responsive and very sustainable ACE sector* (Informant 7), supported by a government–appointed board, the provision of non-accredited adult literacy and numeracy curricula, or delivery in a non-formal education environment was clearly described by many informants as either marginalised, or as already evidenced in one participant's account, non-existent.

According to an account from another State/Territory, where adult literacy and numeracy responsibility is located within an adult and community education unit within a state/territory bureaucracy, adult literacy and numeracy delivery is reported to have suffered as a consequence of the tensions between the dominant training discourse and a less dominant discourse of adult and community education:

> We have to fight really hard to maintain provision to the ACE sector (Informant 16).

where a re-endorsement of funding, allocated to adult literacy and numeracy delivery through non-accredited curricula by community providers on a grants basis, has to be sought each year. This informant provided a detailed description of the difficulties of this process, but stated that a number of people continue 'to do battle' because of a belief in the need to *maintain a community based focus as a pathway to more formalised qualifications* (Informant 16).

A consequence of these competing discourses has been a blurring of the traditional divisions between the adult and community education (ACE) sector and the vocational education and training (VET) sector, most evident in one State/Territory that is described as working towards that goal. In this instance, specific curricula has been developed for community-based adult literacy and numeracy delivery, described by one informant as an important achievement:

> Adult literacy education in the community has to start with what the people want and need, and move on from that (Informant 1).

This informant was able to draw on specific anecdotal evidence of successful outcomes achieved through community literacy programs, many operating in isolated parts of the State/Territory, where

> basic adult literacy training is very much becoming the first step on the pathway to vocational outcomes for many people
> (Informant 1).

The interviewee did make the point, however, that the program was not designed specifically at achieving vocational outcomes, but reiterated that there were definite links between community literacy and a specific ACE vocational program in that State/Territory that were designed, in part, to ensure

> somewhere for people to go, to get on the next step. So that we have a continuum in place, so that's what we're trying to do with this at the regional level
> (Informant 1).

A further evidence of tension between competing discourses appeared in the account of another informant when discussing the impact of the push for the integration (described by this informant as 'inclusion') of literacy and numeracy into vocational education and training:

> I have my doubts as to whether - especially with early levels of beginning literacy and numeracy if inclusion is necessarily a good learner pathway. I have a feeling there are a lot of people who spend a lot of time hiding their difficulties in inclusion situations and in actual fact the actual individual has needs that require a lot of time and energy that cannot be addressed in that inclusion. Difficulties tend to be sidelined and assistance is provided, in a way, like recipes and I think in the end that short-changes the student
> (Informant 8).

This segment of talk gives some elaboration on the description this informant made earlier of *inclusion policy* as *a two-edged sword*, where benefits were certainly ascribed to the vocational area. This excerpt, however, shows the informant's concerns for those students with low levels of literacy and numeracy within this environment.

Taking up a similar theme, another informant anxious to retain what is described in this talk as *pure adult literacy and numeracy* (one of three categories of provision established in the talk of this informant) demonstrated concern over how this interest has become overlooked in the push for securing vocational outcomes. In doing so, the respondent refers to the impact of the National Reporting System:

> ...but obviously the NRS, which was never meant to be more than a recording system for reporting purposes, increasingly has driven the curriculum. So there has been, if you like, a shift in the field unwittingly perhaps, or deliberately that now embraces more the concept of outcomes through the NRS driving what they do, what they establish as a program for the students. And I think that the ALRN now ALNARC research tends to concern itself with these things although some research makes a kind of eleventh hour plea for that pure adult literacy and numeracy, but it also recognises that the first category [adult literacy and numeracy integrated into vocational education and training] is almost a privileged area of literacy and numeracy training. So I know you've got to express outcomes in terms of lifelong learning and that they are not necessarily mutually exclusive
> (Informant 2).

State-based initiatives

All participants were able to provide a range of accounts of various State initiatives in the area of adult literacy and numeracy provision over the last decade or so, with many of them, particularly among 'second string' informants, relating these initiatives back to the influence of NCAELLS, as already discussed. While there were similarities in these accounts as informants explained how each State/Territory determined priorities and distributed federal and state funding through various combinations of direct grants and competitive tendering, the differences in approach, again already apparent from the discussion to date, serve as a reminder of the clear separation of power and responsibility that exists in Australia in certain areas of social policy, including education, as a consequence of this country being a federation.

Curriculum development and implementation

There was clear agreement across the talk of most informants, however, that one of the most significant achievements in adult literacy and numeracy policy and implementation over the last ten years has been the development of adult literacy and numeracy curricula. As put by one informant:

> The development of curriculum based delivery comes directly from the policy documents *[NCAELLS]*
> *(Informant 6).*

while another noted that, in the State/Territory in question locally-developed curriculum, consistent with the National Framework of Adult English Language Literacy and Numeracy Competence, an initiative stemming from NCAELLS, was the

> major conduit through which a lot of language, literacy and numeracy training has been provided.
> (Informant 15).

In describing strategies that have been effective in promoting adult literacy and numeracy provision in their own State or Territory another informant noted

> Curriculum – what's taught and how. Clearly the [course] has had a huge impact on what's taught and how, and it's been a – as something where people have actually kind of worked with it in the adult literacy environment, it's been a crucial strategy
> (Informant 4).

Many of the interviewees gave specific importance to the role of tutors within the various programs on offer in their State/Territory, with a number also noting the positive contribution of the availability of funding for the implementation of (accredited) tutor training, and in some States, for the coordination of tutor activities including tutor mentoring.

In discussing the importance of curriculum in securing outcomes within their State/Territory, a number of interviewees also described the contribution of moderation in providing a valuable focus for teachers' professional development. According to one informant, however,

> It's been valuable because it's been a focus around which teachers can meet, but I think it is a pity that the focus has been on moderation per se because it is limiting the nature of discussion and squeezes out discussion of theory and practice
> (Informant 4).

Decline in professional development

A concern about the limited content of current professional development arrangement noted in this interviewee's account was also raised by other informants. There was also general consensus across informants' accounts, particularly by 'second string' participants, that there had been a decline in professional development over recent years, as summed up in the comment:

> Initiatives for professional development ... seem to have fallen by the wayside, the support for practitioners in the field
> (Informant 8).

What has worked in improving vocational and/or lifelong learning outcomes?

Vocational outcomes

There was common agreement across the accounts on which state-based initiatives have been successful in securing positive vocational outcomes in particular, with a number of these strategies already discussed above. To reiterate, these initiatives include the development of accredited curricula in adult literacy and numeracy and the pathways these create for learners; the various forms of support given to apprentices and trainees in their vocational education and training; the development and implementation of accredited curricula and various support mechanisms for volunteer tutors as well as the impact of specific resources and packages developed through the ANTA Adult Literacy Innovative Projects program. Though it is not a state-based initiative, some informants also noted the important contribution of the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) Program in securing vocational outcomes.

Lifelong learning outcomes

Informants typically had more difficulty, however, in determining if state-based initiatives had impacted on lifelong learning. For some, the difficulty appeared to arise from being asked to separate out lifelong learning outcomes from vocational outcomes:

> It depends how you want to refer to lifelong learning and if lifelong learning is participation in vocational education and training then everything we do is relevant to achieving lifelong outcomes
> (Informant 15).

while other responses included:

> Do you think there is a good split? I mean vocational outcomes (.) is there a difference?
> (Informant 4)

and

> I think vocational is pretty lifelong by itself
> (Informant 6).

Other informants' accounts did seek to make some distinctions, with the following explanation helping to capture what was seen to be the complexity of that task:

> I think one of the difficulties in [state] with the lifelong learning concept is the focus really is on vocational outcomes, and so we use a curriculum that's

> competency based and developed under the training framework requirements (Informant 5).

The following comment of another interviewee also captures the response of a number of informants:

> Lifelong learning ... transcends a competency-based approach which I think is really limiting
> (Informant 4).

The next two comments, both coming from informants within bureaucracies in different States/Territories, demonstrate how these informants seek to arrive at a way of explaining an institutional approach to, and at the same time their personal understanding of, lifelong learning:

> The government's emphasis on education and having an educated society and community, and I think by the government leading through, yes, by the Government leading through just valuing it [lifelong learning] and just by saying it is important is a very, very significant step towards, you know, encouraging and embedding in the communities and in people the concept of lifelong learning. ... I think a number of their strategies including learning towns and some of the managing individual pathways, and, you know, a larger emphasis on education in the community, adult education in the community are all very strong, if you like, strategies to embed lifelong learning as a very very important part of the future of our communities and the people that make up our society. So while I don't think they have a – it's out there in your face, here's what lifelong learning means to us, it's a range of policies, strategies that are, if you like, enhancing that concept and I think once again it's a cultural thing.
> (Informant 7).

This particular account is significant because the speaker makes reference to the concept of 'lifelong learning' as a cultural thing, while also providing some of the ways in which the State/Territory in question is seeking to promote some kind of cultural change within the community. This account takes up a number of the features of a growing lifelong learning discourse that valorises education within the community as well as naming specific strategies including *learning towns* and *managing individual pathways* that can be employed in achieving cultural change.

This second extract of talk also gives an accounting of how government can assist in securing lifelong learning outcomes for program participants through the approach it adopts:

> I think it goes back to the model that we [government] actually utilise in that being able to offer a broad range of provision like out in the community, at the local level or more formally within TAFE or through training providers that is actually one of the keys to enabling people to get on to that lifelong learning pathway. ...The lifelong learning is not just about the individual, its about their participation and its about their contribution over many, many areas, so you could say that somebody might just gain at a community centre the ability to be able to participate in a group.
> (Informant 16).

Another informant with a long involvement in adult community education drew on anecdotal evidence taken from a state-wide community based literacy program as a way of explaining how adult literacy and numeracy programs contribute to the achievement

of lifelong learning outcomes, making the point that these kinds of outcomes may not be achieved in more formal (accredited) education settings:

> So you know there are specific lifelong learning opportunities and particularly we have a large contingent within our [program] people with a disability and the impacts of the hospitalisation and closing down of hostels and people going into the community, and has in [state] as it has in the rest of the world has meant that there are people living in boarding houses and hostels who have very low literacy skills, and not a lot of chance of certainty going within the formal learning systems. It's been those learning opportunities actually about the quality of their life that has had incredible impact, you know for people who couldn't even go down the street, or do their own shopping and now we've got lots of people who work together, you know, within a literacy capacity but its about reworking and reworking. So there's lifelong learning opportunities for those people because the quality of their life has changed
> (Informant 1).

This extract is also interesting in that the informant takes up a theme from discourses on lifelong learning that emphasises how lifelong learning needs to be understood as more than pursuing/achieving vocational outcomes. These discourses stress the importance of lifelong learning being framed as a mechanism through which learners of all ages, at different stages of their lives, can be successful in enhancing their quality of life and life opportunities.

And what hasn't worked ...?

When asked to discuss what strategies have not been effective in enhancing vocational and or lifelong learning informants provided a range of responses, often reflecting on mechanisms peculiar to their own State/Territory/system. There were also many points however, on which the majority of interviewees were in agreement.

Funding arrangements

A number of informants raised for example, the issue of funding arrangements with one interviewee noting:

> One thing that didn't work well I (don't) (sic) think was a competition policy
>
> (Informant 7).

Another informant gave this telling account of how policy formulation, and the funding arrangements that result, is perceived:

> I'd say that the proliferation of unconnected funding sources has been a big problem for people working in the field. It means that because their funding is uncertain and constantly changing, in a (sic) constantly changing policy environment as new ideas just swim out of the heads of bureaucrats and into program ideas, but that's been terribly hard to work with... I feel really critical of the way adult literacy teachers are primarily part time sessional. That's been a product of funding policies
> (Informant 4).

One of the most disturbing effects of this approach for this informant has been its detrimental effect on the adult literacy profession. This same informant also discussed the complexity of working with the combination of commonwealth and state funded programs, describing funding mechanisms as *incredibly inflexible*. The interviewee

gave the following account of how some of this inflexibility was managed within the State/Territory in question:

> I think we worked to mitigate what competition policy does, where people [providers] who are educationally dubious get funded. I think that in the state there was a real effort made to stop that happening. So there was a real effort to arrive at what was like a reasonable rate to run a literacy program of a reasonable size class and that was funded, and you didn't have to compete. Now an element of the funds were forced into a competition type mode, and that's been dropped. So it's been a key aspect I suppose, in relation to funding policy, but it's been a struggle
> (Informant 4).

In raising problems with current funding arrangements, this extract from another informant provides a further explanation of the difficulties:

> We have a very rear vision view of how we fund and how we organise the different sectors of education, I mean our bureaucracy is still structured around schools, TAFEs, you know private providers and ACE and they all have different funding formulas and models, rules so we're a long way – that concept of seamlessness and that concept of lifelong learning on pathways that are not, you know, restrictive are still a long way off
> (Informant 7).

This particular informant was one of just a few interviewees who provided some description of possible future funding arrangements. In doing so, a link is made between funding and existing bureaucratic structures that, it is perceived, mitigate against effective provision. This interviewee hoped for a future when funding could be linked to less restrictive, lifelong learning outcomes.

When asked to discuss strategies that have not been successful, the explanation from another informant linked funding with a number of other factors observed to be connected: namely an overemphasis on vocational outcomes at the expense of the *social and personal* and the inadequacy of a focus on narrow, task-based competencies in curriculum and support materials at the expense of developing underlying, enabling skills:

> I think there has been some differentiation of groups, for example, into labour market as into workplace programs. I think the social and personal has actually been downgraded over the last seven or eight years because of the emphasis on the vocational workplace and I think that's a pity. And that goes back to policies, which interrelated with funding because whereas people may come with a dominant need, generally it impinges on all aspects of their life. And I think that's been detrimental in some cases, I think we also for some period in the last ten years focussed for a while on narrow, task-based competencies... when you get a list of tasks that somebody has to do, like they are able to read the instructions and they specify the instruction for example, I don't think that's really addressing a literacy, numeracy need. It's merely focusing on a task. And what we should be doing, I believe, is enabling the student to gain the ability to have the skills to read any task list of that level, rather than specifics. I think that's possibly a loss over the last four or five years when we've focused on competency based. ... Possibly some of the resource material that has been developed has reinforced that approach. It's what I call recipes rather than the building of the underlying enabling skills which a student really needs if they're going to move on
> (Informant 8).

At the same time as providing a description of what it is believed adult literacy and numeracy curricula should look like, this informant also offers a critique of current curricula, stating that there needs to be a

> focus more on addressing literacy and numeracy needs and less on providing a training outcome. We are guilty of dumbing down the curriculum ... we must keep generic enabling skills
> (Informant 8).

Narrow focus on competencies

A number of other interviewees also listed the narrow focus of competency-based approaches when asked to identify strategies that haven't been successful. In giving this following response, one informant discussed perceptions of more appropriate curricula as well as providing an explanation for the widespread uptake of a competency-based approach to training in general and adult literacy in particular:

> What is needed is transcending the competency approach which, I think has been so limiting ... it has been a straight jacket. ... We need to accredit curriculum that is broader and richer than the competency approach allows for. The competency approach is a gift to control freaks, public servant who like to stand at gateways and let people in and out and control them. It came from, the push was from people who thought that you could get better teaching by introducing greater control. Better to help teachers to be extremely competent and know what they're doing
> (Informant 4).

At another point in the interview, this informant deplored the decline in professional development made available to teachers, and, in this excerpt, returns to this theme again, offering a stronger focus on professional development as a means of ensuring *better teaching.*

In describing strategies that had not been effective in enhancing vocational and/or lifelong learning outcomes, some interviewees took up teaching and learning concerns, as in the following excerpt:

> The ones which are knee-jerk reactions towards very poor resource arrangements ... these compromise resource arrangements and lead to compromise of teaching strategies.
> (Informant 2).

while other participants commented in terms that link to broader issues of policy emphasis and focus, as in this next excerpt of talk:

> a lot of strategies that are thrown up as a one-off you beaut idea but have not got much relationship to their community or the individuals, very rarely work.
> (Informant 1).

What of the future?

Asking informants to consider what future policy initiatives they believed were needed for adult literacy and numeracy provided many of them with the opportunity to return to issues they had previously raised in their accounts.

Processes of review

These reiterations took up various inflections on the need for a national process of review, expressed by one informant for example, as needing to be about:

> It's moderating our programs, its actually I think like looking at the NRS and seeing how it's working. It's evaluation and review that's really necessary in our field and the chance to do this on a national basis rather than just one particular state or territory, that actually provides the opportunities for revitalisation of the field
> (Informant 12).

This informant noted the essential importance of a review at a national level as a means of determining the effectiveness of various programs and reporting mechanisms but also highlighted the essential role of such a review as feeding back into the professional development of people involved in the field.

In discussing the need for curriculum review, another participant also identified what it was believed adult literacy and numeracy curricula needed to address:

> A key role is for the provision of generic literacy and numeracy so that students can access the type of training they need no matter if their personal, social or work status changes
> (Informant 8).

Professional development

This same informant, along with a number of other participants, also returned to the issue of professional development, with the following extract providing an explanation of what future professional development for adult literacy and numeracy practitioners should deliver:

> I think the staff development policy needs re-investigating and I think we need to get back to some professional development if we're going to maintain standards and also continue to be effective, and I don't mean being able to go to a computer course to learn to do whatever. I mean key philosophical and pedagogical roles for adult literacy and basic education
> (Informant 8).

Need for research and evaluation

Some informants reported on particular kinds of research activities in their own State/Territory, with the main type being evaluations of particular forms of funding and delivery mechanisms rather than empirical research that added to a knowledge base of, and for, the field. Taking up the point of some informants about the need for a national process of review further, the talk was significantly marked by a lack of reference to such topics as evaluation of pedagogical processes or of which types of teaching practices worked for particular groups of clients. The lack of this kind of empirical research was framed by one informant as a need for evidence of *Which things work for which kinds of people*? (Informant 6). One informant gave the following description of research effort in this area:

> The research has been fairly weak on the whole in relation to literacy... a lot of the crucial assumptions remain untested by research. There hasn't been enough

> done on why it matters. Like a lot of people say well, you know, "The [curriculum] is good that it's accredited" and I think to myself "I'd like somebody to show me through research why it matters"
> (Informant 4).

As well as identifying a concern over the lack of research, this informant provides some direction on what should be the focus of future research activity, namely on the effects on learners of different kinds of teaching and learning, as presented through curricula. In voicing a concern over research, another informant gave an explanation of its role as to

> maintain that crucial link between grassroots research, policy, implementation, grassroots policy, you know in a circle because otherwise the research is left on its own and the grassroots never seem to have a voice, and the policy makers follow other trends
> (Informant 8).

indicating, in part at least, the significance given by this informant to the link between research, policy and practice.

In describing another area in need of research in the future and, again signifying some lack of evaluative processes in the past, namely into the effectiveness and take up of resource materials developed to support adult literacy and numeracy provision, particularly in vocational education and training contexts, the following informant also provided an accounting of past practice:

> I wonder whether just the production of resources is enough. I don't know how many of our resources (.) whether we should actually spend a little more time on following up on how the resources that we produce are being used and which ones, you know, get a real flogging and which ones just sit on the shelf, which might inform the way to go in the future. So I'm not really sure whether just the production of more resources will, on its own, be a necessarily good thing
> (Informant 6).

Another interviewee alluded to an additional potential and long-term research endeavour when offering this description of proposed adult literacy and numeracy activities in the State/Territory in question:

> An important part of this will be to be able to measure it. We'll have to be patient, but I think one of the things that is really noteworthy here, is that I think we don't really know what we want to measure yet and what I mean by that is, the indicators of success aren't always so obvious and I think it's nothing that you can do in the short term
> (Informant 7).

Literacy and numeracy support not linked to vocational outcomes

A further recurring theme in the talk of many informants was the need for recognition that:

> Not everybody is in vocational training ... we forget that there are people who are keeping the economy going back home and within their communities. I think it's really important to make sure that whatever policies are developed include, you know, the development of citizens and the development of a harmonious community. ... I just think that the whole business of maintaining the social fabric

> is so important and I think that the provision of literacy and language for community is a really important feature of that larger agenda
> (Informant 6).

The link made here to the *maintaining of the social fabric* was taken up in another guise by a number of informants, and discussed under another heading. In describing a current lack of focus on community-based adult literacy and numeracy provision and also the limited opportunities for the offering of non-accredited training in another State/Territory, one interviewee explained that

> Some people actually want to enroll to improve skills that aren't part of an accredited program, and under the way the new AQTF has been implemented it's actually more difficult to develop accredited community-based programs. I guess a future policy initiative I'd like to see in [state] is a recognition of community-based providers and programs
> (Informant 5).

Stronger links to communities

Taking up a similar focus on community, and referring to some of the mechanisms mentioned earlier in this paper on machinery that has been driving state-based implementation in the absence of national and/or state policy, another participant described a future need for

> policy development around the learner and around community developments rather than around the offerings of a particular institution or a VET package or a curriculum document
> (Informant 7).

Just as is evident in this interviewee's account, many informants gave salience to the importance of establishing and sustaining a link between adult literacy and numeracy and community development and needs when asked to discuss what they believed should be the future direction for adult literacy and numeracy. As described by one participant:

> One of the things that I think needs to happen, this is sort of along a national scale and a state scale and a local scale, is that we have to start linking our adult literacy strategies more clearly to where our community is and going to be... in the future
> (Informant 1).

while another interviewee gave a description of what this kind of linkage of national, state and local mechanisms might look like in this segment of talk:

> a local community taking responsibility, much more local responsibility and being connected through that sort of social capital development process. ... a community development approach, placing responsibility and funding it accordingly at a local level
> (Informant 4).

In providing a practical example of how different state-based funding mechanisms and interests need (and in some instances do) to come together to address local concerns, one informant noted:

> because the skills have to be built in the communities to be able to identify and you know and it has to be then the concept of literacy is much broader than reading and writing, there has to be an understood concept. So that if apprentices are falling off the rails and it's because their training is done by distance, and they

> have a literacy need (.) well in [remote town] they'll say very clearly "We've got to have someone who can support these apprentices locally because otherwise they're going to fail"
> (Informant 1).

There is evidence in the talk that community concerns and needs are, to some extent, being taken up in current practices, with again informants giving 'local' accounts of specific state-based initiatives, for example:

> We have Mobile Adult Learning Units (.) actually return to communities and build on the knowledge and the effectiveness of the previous program so that people are given the skills to be able to handle their everyday work and life experiences or what's coming their way.
> (Informant 3)

However there was general agreement, certainly across the talk of 'second string' informants, that this kind of approach needed greater emphasis and commitment in the form of policy and funding in the future.

Different state/community relationships

In arguing for stronger links to communities for and through adult literacy and numeracy provision, many informants turned to existing bureaucratic structures and mechanisms as a means of explaining what they perceived to be existing problems that need to be met in future initiatives.

As a means of commenting on a growing recognition for this proactive community development to happen in the particular State/Territory under discussion in the interview, one participant noted:

> there's the need for bureaucracy to change and the way we resource the sector... There's got to be a lot more local decision making about local needs and well, there's going to be a lot more decisions, resourcing and needs assessed at the local level or the community level more than the centralist level
> (Informant 7).

When arguing further for the need for a restructuring of bureaucracy so that it is *far less sectoral,* this same informant made the telling comment that *the structure of something is a very strong communication* (Informant 7).

A 'second string' informant provided a worthwhile summary of the comments of some other informants who had also expressed frustration with existing systems and mechanisms in giving this explanation of the source of this angst:

> that sort of silo approach, you know, where they've got Commonwealth and State functions within the departments having some responsibility either for literacy education as related to employment prospects, or treated as a pure education activity. And in relation to the particular groups of young people, old people, or women who want to return to work, whatever; and then within government departments like within the state government departments you have dysfunctions, where they each take the silo approach. Then even with education, you know, universities and TAFEs and ACE and schools – because there is particular responsibilities of particular Ministers and particular public servants, they don't talk to each other and they don't have funding policies that allow for the best use

> of resources. So I feel an enormous frustration with the mentality and the sort of territoriality of people who don't consider the needs of the learner ahead of their own kind of day-to-day working life
> (Informant 4).

This informant is clearly frustrated by the seemingly 'divisive' administrative structures in their state/territory and appears to be arguing for a whole of government approach to meet the needs of individuals.

Need for a new national policy

For many of the 'second string' interviewees, talk of what future policy initiatives were necessary in adult literacy and numeracy raised the issue of the need for a new national policy. Having established this need in the talk, however, respondents provided various explanations of the necessity for this. For one informant there was the need for

> a re-establishment of a national and state link at an administrative level. That linkage of goals between policy/administration/delivery and the federal/state nexus needs re-discovering.
> (Informant 8).

This informant, along with a number of others, also returned to the significant role played by NCAELLS in the past by noting:

> Since the end of NCAELLS .... there has not been that cohort if you like of national and state policy advisers, feeding into and feeding from the grassroots people
> (Informant 8).

For this participant at least, one important ingredient missing in current arrangements between state and federal agencies in the area of adult literacy and numeracy is the link that provides input from practitioners and those working at *the grassroots* into both state and federal policy making. While it could be argued that such mechanisms do exist (particularly in one state), clearly these are not as apparent to this informant and others as those arrangements which were operational in the past. This point was made by another 'second string' informant working at 'the grassroots':

> We know the needs in the field. They're still there, but we just need to have the opportunity to talk it through and look at a plan
> (Informant 12).

In giving another justification for a national policy with a new kind of focus, a further informant described it as a

> need for a national approach, you know, some kind of general education committee that would have (.) which would constitute a place we could actually generate national policy in relation to general education. I think, you know, literacy has been driven by the vocational agenda
> (Informant 4).

For another informant who identified the need for a new national policy, this meant:

> A reaffirmation of the inclusive policy of enabling skills as well as specific competencies. Based on a more generic curriculum view ... and therefore a more general implementation policy
> (Informant 8).

In discussing the importance of having policy, rather than other kinds of mechanisms driving adult literacy and numeracy delivery, this same informant noted that:

> Flexibility of response needs to be protected by policy as well as by implementation
> (Informant 8).

Other informants took up the need for a national policy in different ways, with some expressing this as a need for greater cooperation between federal and state/territories bodies. In taking up this theme one participant also providing an explanation of why this was necessary:

> We must have better communication and collaboration (.) we wouldn't all be trying to reinvent the same things, if somebody else has already done it (.) effective communication structure
> (Informant 6).

Taking up a similar concern for improved communication and collaboration, one respondent explained this as a way of making better use of available resources:

> There needs to be more collaboration between the states and the commonwealth than there is ... to avoid duplication
> (Informant 15).

Some informants called on the need for a new national policy as a way of establishing a re-commitment to adult literacy and numeracy in their particular State/Territory. One informant explained this issue in the following terms, giving in the first instance an assessment of where it is believed current commitment is located (*a black hole*) as well providing an explanation of a decline in commitment:

> If you don't actually have a national policy to hinge any State or Territory commitment to then there is just a black hole I think, and that's what we have at the moment. There isn't actually a national policy for adult literacy, numeracy, ESL and if we did then I think as the states showed from the responses before they will then attach implementation strategies to that, but at the moment there is no commitment at the Commonwealth level and I guess at the states level it's dwindled. I suppose it's not a commitment from that end because they're not required to address that issue
> (Informant 9).

At another point of this talk about a drop-off in commitment to adult literacy and numeracy at both federal and state levels, this interviewee noted:

> If we had a national policy again, then it would be implemented because invariably our funds are attached to it
> (Informant 9).

Interestingly, this informant echoes Weller's view of the bureaucrat as corporate manager with a commitment which is finacially driven.

Policy on online learning for adult literacy and numeracy clients

When talking of the need for national policy that would inform practice, some informants raised the issue of the growing importance being given to online delivery of programs, as in the following extract of talk:

> some real policy advice and a framework for the use of on-line learning for people with minimal language, literacy and numeracy skills is really important (Informant 15).

In describing this need as well, the following informant also identifies issues of access and equity associated with it:

> There's a need for polices related to flexible delivery, particularly the potential for on-line education, but that translates into trying to implement something that's realistic for access by students who haven't got access to a computer or the culture that goes with using computers (Informant 2).

While elaborating further of current practice emerging from policy around online training delivery more generally, this same interviewee noted:

> I think implementation strategies from the policy documents external to adult literacy and numeracy are at the moment unshaped because we don't even understand some of the implications of these policy [online delivery] directions... At first it sounds great to be able to offer teaching programs at a time, place and style that suits a particular consumer but later on we realise this has a domino impact on the demands on the teacher for preparation, for availability etc. (Informant 2)

In this segment of talk the informant moves from concerns just about the ability of adult literacy and numeracy students to access and use effectively online learning opportunities, to issues around the demands placed on teachers of this form of delivery, noting that these, as yet, have not been addressed seriously.

Accommodating competing discourses

Strongly evident in the talk of many informants is the existence of contesting discourses around training and community-based education, particularly adult literacy and numeracy provision, as already discussed in this paper. This issue is taken up by one informant, who supported the need for a new national policy for adult literacy and numeracy on the following grounds:

> I think having it [adult literacy and numeracy] completely tied under ANTA is a problem in terms of the general education needs. ANTA's main business is vocational training, that if its something not related to vocational training its really not regarded as important or essential (Informant 9).

Taking up a similar concern about how to accommodate contesting discourses, another interviewee sees the issue as being resolved, at least in part, by working more with discourses of lifelong learning than working within the dominant discourse on training:

> I think we need to protect the flexibility of delivery, maintaining both one-to-one, small groups and large groups and that should come from policy which should be based on lifelong learning outcomes and policies that drive that. Interestingly enough we have much more in common with policy documents on lifelong learning than we do with policy documents on training (Informant 8).

Seeing the big picture

In providing a summary of the future policy needs for adult literacy and numeracy that revisited points raised in many of the accounts already discussed in this section, one

'second string' informant, who has had a long-standing involvement in this area, offered some critique of past practices in the field as a way of directing effort in the future.

This informant commented:

> I think adult literacy and numeracy has remained, if you like, a local folkloric activity despite the extraordinary good political and organisational work done by the people who remain faithful at the professional associations level, and work in bureaucracies at senior level and try to make sure that we have something to say that's going to be effective politically. Despite their attempts I still think we've tended to focus inwards locally as an excuse and that's related to the resourcing issue
> (Informant 2).

As a further explanation for past practices, this informant emphasised that adult literacy and numeracy provision had been compromised by the impact of factors such as the casualisation of staff, narrow-focused, short-term resourcing formulas and limited opportunity provided to teachers to ensure progression within programs - *there's no follow through and progression of where year one is part of something much further down the track*. This interviewee concluded by stating:

> I want to emphasise adult literacy and numeracy I think realise that whether we're talking vocational outcomes and lifelong learning outcomes area, we are talking about adult literacy's ability to be part of a bigger picture
> (Informant 2).

In summary

The purpose of conducting interviews with identified key informants from all Australian States and Territories was to assist this project in answering the question

> What does the past tell us about adult literacy and numeracy policy, provision and research?
> (Project 1 brief)

These informants, in response to pre-determined questions put to them, provided various accounts of past and current adult literacy and numeracy practice. Within these accounts the interviewees discussed those initiatives that they believed had contributed to the achievement of vocational and lifelong learning outcomes as well as described those initiatives that had been less successful. These concerns, made salient by the interviewees themselves, have been identified and discussed.

Again, at the request of the researchers, the interviewees also offered their perspectives on what they believed were the future needs of adult literacy and numeracy in Australia. The discussion then took up the key themes presented in this section of the interviewees' accounts.

As noted at the beginning of this section of the report, the decision was made to closely analyse talk from all informants. It will be recalled that 'first string' informants were to be state-based bureaucrats responsible for the implementation of policy in regard to adult literacy and numeracy. However, the project was unable to locate such incumbents in two of the States/Territories. In addition, incumbents in some other States/Territories had only recently taken up their position, and/or had little or no background in adult literacy and/or numeracy. With these factors in mind, it was decided to extend the close analysis to 'second string' informants also, as these people

were selected for their long-term involvement in adult literacy and numeracy, in some instances involvement that included a role as a state bureaucrat.

This situation may be seen as worrisome, but more importantly it is to be seen as reality. All informants are to be acknowledged and commended for their willingness to share with this project their invaluable perceptions and insights into the position of adult literacy and numeracy in Australia today. It may be appropriate, however, in the interests of the future of adult literacy and numeracy to point to, and be concerned about, what could be, as depicted by Brock (2001p. 51), a "loss of corporate memory expertise". Many of the achievements for adult literacy and numeracy clients in the past have been gained through the invaluable, active promotion of public servants in state systems knowledgeable about, and dedicated to, adult literacy and numeracy concerns. As described by Brock (2001, p. 51)

> loss of corporate memory expertise can leave the public service even more vulnerable to wheel reinvention, external lobby group campaigns and to falling into those traps that inevitably open when form precedes (rather than follows) function in the shaping of policy.

There are a number of examples in the talk presented in this section of the report where informants have given practical instances of what has been previously described as the politicisation of the role of bureaucrat (Weller 2001). Broadly described, the two major areas where this influence seemed to be most apparent was in the caution displayed by those few bureaucrats who allowed themselves to make a foray into policy critique.

These few were characteristically to be found in the group of interviewees who, despite their bureaucratic role within their own organisations, still had or once had a practitioner role as well. They were well able to articulate practice 'at the coal face' of program delivery as it were and the frustrations which they experienced in their professional practice of delivering literacy and numeracy programs under policy guidelines enabled them to see and to mention, if not critique, policy difficulties and inefficiencies. This group was also able to focus on and report on deficiencies, even if somewhat restrainedly, in other objectives related to access and equity issues which were not solely policy driven but owed some place in the stated social justice perspectives of the programs.

The second manifestation of the politicisation of the role and function of bureaucrats was seen in the great enthusiasm with which several informants articulated the 'rightness' of the general policy thrust into vocational training and jobs outcomes. Whilst this was not a blatant 'hard sell' in a unilateral manner, nonetheless with several of the interviewees, policy advocacy seemed to occur at the expense of developing reflective insights into the very complex nature of the community and the training market, even though all the interviewees' accounts showed awareness that this complexity was the case. The inference is that perhaps policy advocacy was primarily what they saw their organisational role and function to be and they reflected this understanding in their substantiation procedures.

With these concerns aside, informants' talk presents a body of evidence on the significant achievements made in adult literacy and numeracy in this country in the past. As a 'body' of evidence the talk also contains important signposts to the future. It is to these signposts that the project must turn, so that it can provide the essential evidence that can be used, in Wickert's (2001, p. 78) terms, in "repositioning" adult literacy in Australia's future.

The talk secured a clear need for a new national policy though informants displayed different reasoning practices in arriving at this consensus. There was consensus across the talk of the positive and tangible impact of NCAELLS which was derived from adult literacy policy initiatives contained within ALLP (1991). What is established in the accounts offered is that new policy needs to take up a particular "form" so that appropriate "functioning" can evolve from it.

While acknowledging what had been achieved by past efforts to situate adult literacy and numeracy within the national training agenda, the majority of informants clearly indicated that new directions must now locate adult literacy and numeracy within wider social, economic and political concerns. This is particularly evidenced in that talk that focused on the relationship between literacy and community capacity building, and on the achievement of lifelong learning outcomes that take on broader concerns than addressing purely vocational needs.

Informants gave indications of what these new directions may be, highlighting, for example, the need for different kinds of alliances with areas beyond the traditional boundary created by education and training in which adult literacy and numeracy has typically been placed. These new alignments will arise from needs as they are presented within communities and as they relate to all aspects of people's everyday lives: their health, welfare, housing and economic concerns.

A number of informants also made a call for a different approach from governments so that they can become better at responding to individual and collective need as displayed in particular communities. There were examples provided on how governments might give more energy to ensuring, as put by Brock (2001, p. 51), that function precedes form.

There are, of course, many challenges that emerge from these concerns for all stakeholders involved in adult literacy and numeracy and the work will not be easy. What remains certain, however, is the reality that "adult literacy as a matter requiring a policy response is not going to go away" (Wickert, 2001, p. 90).

For practitioners and activists, this challenge is different from that faced by their counterparts just over a decade of ago who succeeded in getting their concerns written into mainstream language and literacy policy. The challenge comes, in part, from ensuring the same kind of success is achieved by getting adult literacy and numeracy written in wider mainstream policies, evidence of which is starting to emerge from other developed nations. Tied to this challenge is the forming of new synergies in securing mutual goals for the client groups these synergies represent.

Also integral to this process is the astute use of the growing body of evidence emerging from various OECD studies as well as other forms of overseas research of the ways in which literacy and numeracy are linked to wider social and economic agendas. Wickert (2001, p. 78) has noted that OECD concerns about low literacy and numeracy skills in industrialised countries was a factor in bringing adult literacy concerns to the attention of the Federal government in the late 80s and early 90s resulting in the insertion of adult literacy into the ALLP (1991). The goal now must be to just as effectively promote OECD current concerns with the links between effective literacy/numeracy and community development and social participation (OECD, 2000).

The challenge must also include how the adult literacy and numeracy field forms working, effective relationships with the governments of today. As described by Wickert (2001, p. 81):

> opportunities for, and characteristics of, policy intervention are being reconstituted as the administrative and competitive state refashions itself to be increasingly beyond or outside the familiar opportunities for influence.

This task means that all stakeholders including practitioners, advocates, bureaucrats and researchers learn to work with the new bureaucratic structures without denying the need to allow appropriate voice for the concerns of all members of the community that only comes from genuine community consultation and involvement in all stages of policy development, implementation and review.

In order to take these issues forward, the next section of the report presents some brief case studies of overseas practice in literacy policy and programs. This section responds to the second research question "Can Australia be informed by new policy and program developments in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in industrialised countries?"

Overseas Practice in Literacy Policy and Programs which may be Influential upon the Australian Experience.

This second part of this research project focuses upon overseas countries and how their formulation, implementation and evaluation of literacy and numeracy policy can offer some guidance within the Australian context.

Material has been gathered from the resources of international surveys like the IALS, economic and educational participation statistics published by UNESCO and the OECD and other bodies which survey and review educational participation on a global scale. These documents can and should inform the policy and practice of Australian governments in relation to adult education and training policy and practice, but specifically in relation to adult literacy and numeracy. Several exemplar countries have been selected for study here and the reason for the inclusion of each of them is detailed in every section. The materials which have been used are available to researchers through the world wide web and other text sources like specialist library services.

The countries that this study chooses to report and comment upon are mostly but not all participants in the OECD International Survey of Adult Literacy (1996, 2000). Some countries were deliberately selected because the IALS data reveals them to have significantly similar adult literacy profiles and patterns as were detected in Australia. Secondly, some of these countries were selected because they share certain other population demographics and indices of disadvantage in particular cohorts of clients with low literacy and numeracy skills as characteristically occur in Australia. Finally some countries were chosen because the development of their education programs occurred in common or in similar historical contexts to those of Australia. Also included for contrast with westernised industrialised countries like Australia are some developing countries who have undertaken mass literacy campaigns among disadvantaged clients groups perceived to have low literacy and numeracy skills. The point of the selection of these countries will be to emphasise what literacy enacted as social practice can mean for policy implementation in this area. Above all, one country has been selected which the writers conceive is a model of good practice for adult literacy and numeracy instruction, overlaid with an agenda of economic well being and lifelong learning, which might have some parallels and some worthwhile applications to the Australian context. We choose to write about this exemplar of good practice first.

Sweden

The movement which could have closest relevance to elements of the literacy policy and program enhancement in Australia is, surprisingly, not from the historically antecedent model of the United Kingdom or a common English language country like the United States or Canada. Nor is it from a Pacific neighbour like New Zealand (although all these countries have strong elements in common with the Australian experience in adult education) but from the Swedish Learning Circles movement. The movement is a populist, community based, supportive adult learning consortia of voluntary self-improvement groups. They cooperatively engage in collectively organised and owned adult learning experiences in both formal and non-formal educational settings which range over the whole lifetime of the individual and the community (Suda, 2001).

The Swedish Learning Circles movement does already have parallels in Australian adult education circles and in early adult community learning movements. Programs like the 19th century Mechanics Hall movement and the Community Arts Halls reflect a historical interest in Australia in community sponsored and controlled adult education. Boards of Adult Education and university sponsored outreach programs developed this precursory impetus in adult and community learning in the mid 20th century. More recently, this interest has been perpetuated by, for example, the peak body for adult basic education in Australia, Adult Learning Australia, which formally conducts Learning Circles programs through the proliferation of community projects and in published kits on public education issues like republicanism, aboriginal reconciliation and the environment.

The historical concern for community control of adult education has also been continued in the adoption and subsequent adaptation of the learning circle methodology and pedagogy in some institutions of higher education in Australia. There are some grounds for a belief that the popularity of the concept and practices of "mentoring" in workplaces and in public education enterprises arises from a degree of familiarity and accord with Learning Circles pedagogy within the Australian programmatic context.

The practices of the Swedish Learning Circle movement are also to be found spontaneously occurring in friendship and interest groups which operate among Australian adults in local community settings and in a limited form in non-accredited hobby, general liberal arts and interest courses in TAFEs and Institutes of Adult Education funded under several Australian States' ACE programs, for example in Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia. The principles and practices in the on-line and distance education programs which are currently on offer from Registered Training Organisations might also be characterised as reflecting some of the mentoring activity which is both a component part and a corollary of the Swedish Learning Circle movement.

The most important contribution which the Swedish Learning Circles movement may have to offer Australian adult basic education programs, particularly literacy and numeracy, is the amalgamation of the provision of learning opportunities into a philosophy of lifelong learning which does not limit adult education to formal educational institutions or settings. This is not to state that informal community based learning is intended at a policy or public education funding level to be superseded by 'private' community based education, rather that the Swedish model recognises the value of the informal learning which takes place in communities on a daily basis. Whilst the Swedish movement cannot be considered a lifelong education paradigm in the sense that its participating clients are almost universally of post secondary school age, it does embrace other crucial principles of lifelong learning theory and practice which should influence Australian thinking on adult education. These are the principles of offering educational opportunities over a whole life time at the various intersections in an individual's and the community's life when education is called for and that lifelong learning itself is also an important aspect of building individual skill and community capacity. Should a model reflecting some of the good principles of the Swedish Learning Circles movement be adopted in Australia, it may raise the standard of adult Australian literacy and numeracy competence from the mediocre, middle ranks of the IALS scale to towards the top ranking for prose and quantitative literacy currently held by Sweden .

The United Kingdom

For reasons which are strongly rooted in a common history of educational participation, a similar system of educational administration and accepted teaching practice in the common language, English, Australia has been and is still significantly influenced by developments in adult education and training policy emanating from the United Kingdom. The discourses of education and training for social and economic participation and the rhetoric of lifelong learning which emanates from the UK (see Brine 2001; Ecclestone 1999; Griffin, 2000; Nicoll & Edwards, 2000) are also influential in academic thinking and research about these issues in Australia and has an effect, be it somewhat uneven in the various different States, in official adult literacy policy and practice.

The UK pursues an approach to adult literacy and numeracy instruction which has been largely in accord with programs and practices in Australia. The first feature has been an emphasis on targeting disadvantaged communities and the second is a latter-day thrust into digital and related technology as a way to cross the digital divide for these target groups in achieving equitable access to programs and instruction. Beyond these foci, the discourse about workplace productivity being augmented by increased basic skills and achieving technology based 'Universities of Excellence' is remarkably similar to the Australian rhetoric about the 'Clever Country'. Another significant similarity is the focus on schools and schooling as the key cause of deficits in adult literacy and numeracy and the concentration of effort in schooling programs as a kind of preventative measure against adult literacy and numeracy difficulties. However the British government's recently released report *Skills for life: The national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills* (DfEE, 2001) is worthy of note as it takes up a new, whole of government, approach to adult literacy and numeracy issues. It recognises the varying contexts in which adults require assistance and addresses issues of practice and research as integral to its success. The British government's strategy brings together foci on healthcare, criminal justice and financial systems and it is supported with a commitment of £1.5 billion over the next three years. Though it is apparent that in the past the United Kingdom has worked with some initiatives drawn from Australia's approach to adult literacy and numeracy, there may be some particular lessons from this strategy which could inform the Australian context. One significant recent initiative worth noting is the location of a committee chaired by a Minister within the British government cabinet with overall responsibility for the implementation and coordination of the adult literacy and numeracy strategy across all portfolios.

The United States of America

The American approach to intergenerational literacy and numeracy instruction (National Literacy Summit, 2000), through the conduct of federally initiated but State funded and managed programs contains some important positive lessons for Australian policy and programs. The most important is that literacy and numeracy are seen in contexts which, whilst they may have application to models of productivity augmented by upgraded skills and wealth redistribution via gainful employment, are still potentially rooted in social practice, in this case family and inter-generational activities. A predominating belief in the power of literacy and numeracy instruction in family contexts (which can include work and other communities of practice) can also extend the potency of improved literacy and numeracy skills for proactive social interaction and community cohesion. It is anticipated that it might even extend into social justice contexts like

restorative basic education for family members in correctional services and linguistically specific language programs for indigenous target populations.

The second positive lesson for Australia is that much of program delivery is State funded and curricula are diversified and customised for target groups and contexts for example prisons, ethnic and womens' groups, so delivery can be operationalised out into the community and at arms length from purely formal education environments, both practices commensurate with good adult education pedagogy. Despite the positive US literacy and numeracy programs targeting the family and even overlaid with the rhetoric of concern for literacy as a social practice which informs all aspects of daily living, the indices of literacy in America are still growth negative and still reflect gross social and wealth inequities on largely racial and class lines.

This finding is not out of line with similar findings in Australia about literacy levels of, for instance, indigenous peoples, those with inadequate educational participation and attainment, the chronically poor and the long term unemployed. In this light, the lesson for Australia is that literacy alone will not achieve wealth re-distribution nor social justice. These larger issues can only be affected by concerted action in the fields of general education and employment policy, job creation and wealth re-distribution conducted in conjunction with better, more relevant literacy policy and programs, particularly for adult learners.

What is even more disturbing as a lesson for policy makers in Australia is the consistent erosion of adult literacy and numeracy program funding in the USA despite statements made under the Clinton Democrat regime about the importance of literacy and the findings of a recent publication which pinpoint the growing "mediocrity and inequality" in adult basic education provision for disadvantaged target groups in the US (Sum, Kirsch & Taggart, 2002). The key lesson for Australia is that programs are not delivered by political talk but through funded, coordinated program approaches. Without these programs, standards steadily erode with all sorts of consequences for all types of communities but particularly target communities of low skilled or marginalised members. In 2001, the National Coalition for Literacy in the United States released its report *From the Margins to the Mainstream: An Action Agenda for Literacy* (NCL, 2000) making a call for greater action in the areas of federal and state funding. Though, to date, the coalition has not been successful in achieving the action it seeks, its membership includes the American Medical Association which has identified "health literacy" as a key issue (NCL, 2000). The forming of these kinds of cross-sectoral links is a strategy that could inform the Australian context.

Canada

The Canadian attitude to adult literacy and numeracy which could be instructive to Australia, has been to avoid a federalised policy approach but rather to strategically fund both research and programs which deal with particular aspects of literacy deficit on an ad hoc needs basis. This is closely paralleled by practice in Australia, for example by programs like the previously described ACE and Community Literacy Programs which achieve good outcomes on small budgets among target cohorts in community settings. Nonetheless, the overall state of adult literacy in Canada today reflects the fact that, whilst literacy levels of recent school leavers are improving, there has been no overall improvement in the adult population by virtue of these ad hoc strategies over the last

five years. A similar pattern of little improvement in the general low skilled segment of the adult population seems to be emerging in Australia.

The Canadian IALS findings make significant mention of the official language policy of biligualism of Canada as a factor determining literacy achievement among Canadian citizens. This has arisen from a generalized finding that more francophones were at lower levels on the skills base than anglophones whilst the reverse was true at the highest levels of skill. Nonetheless, when adjusted for overall educational attainment, these ethnic differences disappear and a pattern common among developed nations tends to repeat itself. In the case of Canada, this pattern is that literacy and numeracy competence divides sharply along racial, income acquisition and labour market participation lines. As occurs in the USA, Australia and the UK, the poorer you are, the longer you have been unemployed, whether you are a member of an ethnic or a language minority and, if you are socially or geographically isolated and cannot practice what literacy skills you do have, the more likely it will be that you will have and continue to have low literacy and numeracy skills, which in turn are more likely to be perpetuated among your children and in your community. Each variable in isolation is not necessarily an influencing factor, but as the combination of variables increases so the impact is compounded.

The mechanics of adult literacy and numeracy funds provision are that the Canadian Literacy Secretariat acts as a kind of brokerage for the reporting back of local literacy programs and initiatives, whilst at the same time acting as the distributor of substantial amounts of research funding for adult literacy with and within key target areas and groups.

The focus on 'issues' related literacy practices in key areas has been the development of a thematic approach to literacy provision in line not only with perceived deficits but also in keeping with perceptions of need in the community's social and cultural practice. One outstanding example has been the implication of low literacy and numeracy skills into health and life style related practices among Canadians (Literacy and the Health of Canadians, 2002). Thus there is a vast literacy and health network among State agencies and private stakeholders in public education activities related to pharmacopoeia, smoking, obesity and exercise. In relation to general adult literacy, local State and particularly district programs are funded around targeted local issues and interest groups and achieve some local outcomes with limited budgets. This is closely paralleled by practice in Australia, for example by programs like the previously described Community Literacy Program.

New Zealand

The approach to adult literacy and numeracy in New Zealand indicates some strong parallels with the Australian experience. This is not surprising, given a similar history and experience with basic education provision in both countries and the experience of a significant underclass of educationally disadvantaged citizens, including in New Zealand's case, a very substantial indigenous population. The New Zealand method, to date, has been to avoid a whole of government approach and the development of a national literacy policy with stated ideological underpinnings, planned outcomes and objectives. In fact, the first National Draft Literacy policy in 1993 was rejected by the Government and the most recent draft has yet to be adopted by the New Zealand administration. Instead the focus has been on strategic programs among specific target

populations usually identified by various indices of disadvantage, for example Maori community groups, women, workers with low skills in work place programs, and thereafter to leave the general raising of adult generic skill levels to small community based programs. As a consequence the results of these programs are also of various quality, characteristically being most successful among Maori language target groups.

In 2001, however, the New Zealand government released its adult literacy strategy, *More Than* Words (Office of the Ministry of Education, 2001). Though the government is yet to commit funds to this strategy, it is worth noting for the Australian experience that the strategy recognises that "[p]oor literacy is strongly correlated with a greater likelihood of unemployment, lower pay when in work, poor health, less likelihood of owning a home, and poorer basic skills for children living with adults with poor literacy" (NZ Ministry of Education, 2001: 4). This statement reinforces the recognition in New Zealand as elsewhere of the need to place adult literacy concerns within broader socio-economic agendas.

India and Nicaragua

Although they are not 'westernised' or industrialised countries, India and Nicaragua can be cited to illustrate the principles behind mass literacy programs undertaken in both countries for target populations with perceived low skills and which may strategically inform Australian policy, practice and programs. They are only bracketed together because the purpose in so doing is to illustrate what Government organised and backed "mass literacy" campaigns amongst palpably disadvantaged mass target groups have to offer to enlighten and augment the Australian experience. Beyond that, there are extraordinary differences between these campaigns and their outcomes reflect this disparity more than any arbitrary description of their supposedly 'common' purpose.

What it is possible to say of them both is that these mass literacy campaigns echo the hypothesis of Heath (1986, cited in Street, 1993) at the micro-ethnographic level, namely that without significant institutional supports and functions in everyday life, literate practices are at best difficult to teach and at worst practically unsustainable. These different campaigns also illustrate the view of Luke (1993, p. 3) that

> Like language maintenance, the propagation of literacy in any given community is contingent on: first, enabling 'institutional supports' strategies and policies; and second, the necessity for texts and textuality in daily economic and cultural practices. These would appear to be necessary and sufficient conditions for sustainable cultures and subcultures of literacy.

The lesson to Australia is twofold, first that mass programs must be reinforced by literacy enacted as social practice, permeating all aspects of communities' work and cultural life. Secondly, reinforcement of literacy program objectives is best achieved by the wholehearted political will of governments who should pursue an integrated 'whole of government' approach to literacy policy and funding if literacy is to be reinforced in all facets of communities' lives.

Governments implemented mass literacy campaigns in both countries, however the differences in implementation are far more pertinent than the commonalities of intention and target groups. These differences partially explain why India has a mass illiteracy rate higher today than in the 1950's, despite large scale targeting of the rural and semi rural poor and why the massive gains of the Sandinista inspired Nicaraguan

Literacy Year (1981) have taken so long to be materially eroded by a lack of concerted support from subsequent more conservative political regimes.

An example of the experience of mass literacy instruction in India has been that, when follow up surveys were conducted in the 1980s among rural villages four months after the mass literacy program had been implemented, 85% of villagers overall (and a significantly higher number of older women than all other persons) had returned in that four months to their previous state of low or no skills. Those whose literacy skills remained operational were actually constantly using these skills at all levels of village and family life.

Given that even in the present day there is still no universal elementary education guaranteed to the Indian population and that the children of the rural and urban poor are the least likely to access non-compulsory primary schooling, it is hardly surprising that, despite some growth in the rate of children attending primary schooling and slowly increasing retention rates, overall adult literacy at present (58%) is lower than it was in the 1950's (73%).

The situation in Nicaragua was significantly different with the incorporation of the mass literacy campaign of 1981 into a major political and cultural revolution. Literacy was one tool among several, including more equitable land ownership, better maternal and child health and better education of the lower ranked factory workers, used to raise the status and participation of the poorest citizenry. This political revolution was undertaken as an integrated campaign based on an overarching ideological agenda of the citizens' right to fuller social and economic participation. Literacy was in a sense built into, rather than added on to this agenda, thus literacy related activities became part of the common work and community life. As the Sandinista government collapsed and was replaced by successive conservative regimes who did not draw their fundamental ideology nor their constituency from the ranks of the workers or the marginalised, so literacy programs have not been reinforced by social action programs which support and facilitate increased participation. Hence literacy rates have declined to a current level of 69% of the adult population, where in 1884 they stood at 84%.

As previously stated, there are two lessons for Australia to draw from these examples of policy driven mass literacy campaigns among adults, particularly disadvantaged adults. The first lesson is that mass programs must be reinforced by literacy enacted as social practice, and enacted over and over again in the daily activities of the community's life. Secondly, reinforcement of literacy program philosophy is best achieved by the solid political will of governments who should pursue an integrated 'whole of government' approach to literacy and numeracy policy and funding alongside a belief in the values of emancipatory education and equal opportunity for disadvantaged persons and groups.

This brief discussion does not give the credit that is due to the significant and innovative policies and practices that have emerged in developed (and developing) countries over recent years. Its purpose here is, in part, to act as a kind of 'wake-up' call to Australia that it is falling behind in its responsiveness to local-global demands to give adult literacy and numeracy concerns their appropriate recognition within wider social and economic agendas.

Conclusion

It is time now to return to the beginnings of this report and restate the premise underpinning this project. That is, that the role of policy research is not to define policy, rather it is to locate a body of evidence from which informed policy may then be developed (Lerner and Lasswell, 1951, cited in Sum et al, 2002). This project set out to locate and analyse various takes on a 'body' of evidence, and in so doing has demonstrated that, in Lo Bianco's (2002, p. 33) terms a considerable 'gap' exists between the persistent 'evidence' of an ongoing need for adult literacy and numeracy policy in Australia and any existing, or any proposed future policy 'action'.

These various takes signify, of course, that filling that 'gap' will be no simple task. On the contrary, an inspection of the various 'bodies of evidence' uncovered in this exploration serves to highlight quite markedly the diverse competing and contradictory disciplinary and discursive positions that occupy the adult literacy and numeracy field. This is not to say that it is an impossible task to secure adult literacy and numeracy policy and implementation that seeks to respond more coherently, collaboratively and effectively to the diversity of need that exists. In this regard it is worth emphasising a point made by Wickert (2001, p. 90) who wants "to suggest that the proposition of opposing cultures is a question for interrogation, in that such a discursive position may be obscuring possibilities for policy intervention".

Taking up a point first made by Yeatman (1995, quoted in Wickert, 2001, p. 90) that "presentness is all we have", the challenge is to work with the considerable evidence we have and with the "opposing cultures" exhibited through the competing discourses unearthed in this report, to fashion new ways of responding to adult literacy and numeracy needs.

To restate some of the more significant 'finds' this project has located, there is an immediate need in Australia for a commitment, in the form of a whole-of-government approach at federal, state and territory levels, to adult literacy and numeracy as an integral part of all social policy work. This means moving beyond what has become the traditional placement of adult literacy and numeracy in education policy to its take up within and across a range of policy areas including health, welfare, criminal justice, finance, public housing and technology. Griffin (2000, p. 1) has warned that focusing just on education policy can mean getting locked into "conceptual boundaries of division which may be unhelpful in the analysis of public provision of welfare services". This is not to say that adult literacy and numeracy provision should not be in education (and training) policies, but rather that it also needs to be written into the policy areas already mentioned.

Tied to this need is the imperative to address in meaningful ways the issue of access to, and equitable distribution of, information communication technologies (ICT). Many Australians with low literacy and numeracy skills are already excluded from the distribution of essential goods and services by their lack of access to, or lack of skills in the use of ICT, particularly when these low skills are coupled with other factors such as poor health or addictions, homelessness and lack of financial resources. With the rapid expansion of technologies, and the increasing dependence on ICT in the delivery of services, there is a very real likelihood that the number of people becoming excluded from various forms of social and economic participation will also increase rapidly. A cross-sectoral approach that more closely matches the interrelatedness of these factors in people's everyday lives must be implemented. The impact low literacy and numeracy

skills have on how well people can look after their health, welfare, housing, financial, technological and education and (re)training needs is not presented in neat, compartmentalised ways, but rather in a more inconveniently disorderly, but 'real' fashion.

Addressing adult literacy and numeracy needs with a coordinated approach resembling how these needs are presented and lived within communities, creates more potential for developing stronger communities and social cohesion than a narrow focus on vocational outcomes. It would also address in many practical ways Brock's (2001) contention that it is governments' responsibility to ensure that policy work puts "function" ahead of "form". The task of coordinating such a whole-of-government response needs to reside at the highest level, within federal government cabinet, with a cabinet committee responsible for ensuring the appropriate functioning of a whole-of-government approach.

This commitment must also lead to appropriate means of accountability against which states and territories can be called to answer not only to the federal government, but more significantly, to the communities to whom they are all ultimately responsible. This task involves the identification of outcomes that are meaningful to all stakeholders and reflect a broader, cross-sectoral approach that may focus on, for example, better individual and collective health outcomes, dropping crime rates, improved fiscal skills, enhanced ICT skills and access, increased employment outcomes and a growth in job creation and opportunities. This system must be accompanied by the collection and regular, detailed analysis of relevant data that will inform in meaningful ways future cross-sectoral policy initiatives. An important adjunct to this approach is the development of a coherent, suitably resourced research program that will also feed into future policy directions.

A cross-sectoral approach would not only place great demands on adult literacy and numeracy practitioners' skills, but also put these people 'in demand' by the various agencies within the community, many of whom have tried for years to take a more wholistic approach to people's needs, as they are funded in more creative ways to implement wholistic strategies. These wholistic strategies could also provide the opportunities for lifelong learning in its truest sense, that is formal and informal forms of learning that lead to individual and community improvement, development and capacity building. These kinds of demands will mean an increased requirement for a nationally coordinated approach to practitioners' professional development needs as well as to ensuring that there are appropriately trained adult literacy and numeracy practitioners for the future.

It is time then for all stakeholders in adult literacy and numeracy to work together towards developing a new vision for adult literacy and numeracy in Australia. According to Kell (2001, p. 253) "the challenge of new futures will be focused on developing the strategic alliances and networks needed to participate in global and local settings typified by diversity and multiplicity". When these alliances and networks lead to more wholistic responses to diverse and multiple individual and community needs, through policy, then Australia will be better placed to return to its vanguard position on the international adult literacy and numeracy scene. Failure to act may mean that Australia becomes characterised as a nation marked more by its lack of concern for some of its most vulnerable citizens than it is by its commitment to building a socially just and inclusive society that cares for the social and economic wellbeing of all.

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APPENDIX 1

Semi-structured survey

Skills to support lifelong learning and socio-economic wellbeing in the information age

Note: Interviewers will need to explain some terms according to the context and the experience of the interviewee.

Preamble:

The Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium (ALNARC) is a national collaboration among university-based centres in each state for research into adult literacy and numeracy. ALNARC is conducting a survey with a sample of

- State and Commonwealth policy-makers, and
- practitioners (who may include managers of adult literacy programs or policies in TAFE, private providers, enterprises and Industry Training Advisory Boards),

to examine perspectives about the role of adult literacy and numeracy in lifelong learning and national socio-economic wellbeing.

In many ways this project is based on the need to redefine literacy. The impact of information and communication technology and the increasing rate of change in our everyday lives mean that the skills we learn today will no longer equip us for life. Education must be pursued throughout life — 'lifelong learning'. As a result of these changes, the nature of literacy and numeracy is changing. Current literature captures the complexities involved in these changes through use of the term 'multiliteracies'. Multiliteracies are those skills which a person requires to function effectively as an individual, a citizen, a worker, a learner, in these new times.

This survey aims to tease out some of the issues around these so-called 'multiliteracies'.

1. Name: .....
2. Position and responsibility with respect to adult literacy and numeracy.
3. What has been your involvement with literacy and numeracy policy development and/or implementation?
4. What are the key **policy documents** that have driven adult literacy and numeracy research and practice in your State/Territory over the past 10 years?
    a. Note: (slightly re-worded for Commonwealth interviewees)
    b. (Practice should include programs and professional development)
5. What **implementation strategies** have derived from these initiatives?
6. Which strategies have been effective in enhancing **vocational outcomes**? Please elaborate.
7. Which strategies have been effective in enhancing **lifelong learning outcomes**? Please elaborate
8. Which strategies have not worked so well? Please elaborate.
9. What future policy initiatives are needed?
10. How might these be implemented effectively?
11. Is there anything else you would like to add?

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